

**REFLECTIVE OPERATIONS IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S
TRANSATLANTIC RECEPTION**

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ABSTRACT

The thesis explores the literary reputation of Edgar Allan Poe by linking two separate moments of his reception: the one in mid-nineteenth-century French discourse and the other in early twentieth-century Anglophone criticism. These moments are illustrated, on the one hand, by the appropriation project of his translator, Charles Baudelaire, and, on the other, by the critical essays of William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, and Aldous Huxley. The thesis builds a system of relations between these selected contexts by making the Baudelairean project the fulcrum of the Anglophone writings; these are considered to be an oblique, spill-over effect of his montage-piece which ennobled Poe aesthetically in European modernist contexts.

The findings of textual analysis are pitted against one another so as to identify discursive instances of accord and departure in each critical account of the aesthetic value of Poe's work. The juxtaposition is used in order to bring about the transatlantic negotiation that takes place therein, but also the overdetermination that characterises the two opposing national repertoires. Poignantly aware of the reinvented, French Poe, the Anglophone modernist writers responded by foregrounding linguistic nativity as an index of literariness: his worth, in other words, can only be decided by same-language readers. This primacy of linguistic nativity as a literary arbiter of taste is confirmed by Eliot and Huxley and debunked by Williams. Their attempt, however, is destabilised at the very moment when they integrate the French inscriptions into their narrative structures.

The comparative perspective of the thesis establishes that every enactment of transatlantic opposition is bound to generate novel, unwarranted meanings which subtly escape the insular presuppositions of the writers by producing hybridity effects. Despite its symmetrical tidiness, the discussion reveals asymmetries of manipulation as soon as each account becomes a reflection of the others. In this light, the thesis attempts to illustrate the strategic role of comparativism as a tool of investigation that can help to transcend nation-centred constraints. By its very design, it advertises a conflation of 'content' and 'method,' made evident in its central hypothesis: the transatlantic semiosis of the figure of Poe was made available for further cultural use through a series of competing concentric discourses which were already corrupted by reflective operations.

DECLARATION

I, Maria Filippakopoulou, declare that the thesis has been composed and completed by me, and it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Maria Filippakopoulou

To my Greco-Scottish family

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Introduction

*les choses existent, nous n'avons pas à les créer;
nous n'avons qu'à en saisir les rapports*
Stéphane Mallarmé¹

The Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun, who lived for a period of time in the American Midwest in the eighteen eighties, dismissed, in 1889, American literature in the following words:

American literature, by and large, is not the expression of American *life* that the newspapers are. It makes no impression; it is too little of this world; it prates too much and feels too little; it contains too much fiction and too little reality; it does not portray, it praises; it speaks with eyes turned heavenward; it fiddles with virtue and Boston morality; [...] if a hurricane were to come along, a gust of modernity through this poetic wretchedness, it would help. But there is a duty on hurricanes, and hurricanes do not whistle the national tune. American literature is completely untouched and untouchable. It lies three whole evolutionary stages behind European literature [...] American literature does not show any trace of influence from our present-day literature. No thirst for development burns in these poets; they have learned their craft once and for all, and they know their craft. What do they care that there are men in the great civilized lands who have thought of writing about life, that there are others who have begun to depict the mimosa-like stirrings of the human psyche? It does not concern them at all; they are Americans, they are patriots [...] Thus Americans are cut off from reading modern literature in the original.²

Hamsun added, against this background of insular complacency, 'I exclude a little of Poe, a little of Hawthorne, a little of Harte'.³ Needless to say, Poe's exceptional status is a commonplace, even at such early days. However, his specificity, unlike other American writers of European renown, is that he has turned out to be the American author who tested the capacity of American critics to read even national literature in the original. Poe's work translated back from the French⁴ brings to sharp

¹ Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, notes et préface de Daniel Grojnowski (Vanves: Les Éditions Thot, 1982), p. 79.

² 'Writing and Writers', in *The Cultural Life of Modern America*, ed. and tr. by Barbara Gordon Morgridge (Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 33-77 (pp. 33-34).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴ What is also known in Poe scholarship as the French face of Poe; cf. Patrick F Quinn, *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957).

focus the challenges and problems facing Anglo-American criticism in its various attempts at self-definition. It might seem sensational to say that there was a single moment when Anglo-American criticism became more Anglocentric than ever as it tried to acknowledge the deviant critical teachings of the French: this was in the period between 1925 and 1948 when Edgar Allan Poe's transatlantic meaning was probed by William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot and Aldous Huxley. The catalyst for these probings was Charles Baudelaire's project of translation by which Poe was re-invented and appropriated in mid-nineteenth century French letters. The present thesis identifies these three critical instances as distinct responses to Baudelaire's project of ennoblement, to which they refer explicitly, and builds a system of relations out of them that spans nearly a century.

Before elaborating on the nature of this relational system, a point should be made about the choice of texts, first Baudelaire's critical pieces, and then those of the Anglophone critics. The shortcut 'Baudelaire's project' I have consistently used wishes to suggest that Baudelaire handled the original author of the tales he translated in a holistic, culturally meaningful and assertive way that proved highly influential. As such, his work contains two facets, one purely translational and the other critical, which again designates comprehensively criticism, translator's notes and introduction, philological exegesis, cultural commentary, biographical relating - to name only its most important elements. The layout of the thesis has prioritised the second, critical aspect of his project for three reasons: first, because the evidence in existing Poe scholarship suggests that Poe's French reception was a response less to the translations proper than to the critical pieces Baudelaire wrote to accompany them. This does not mean that the actual translations were not read by the French for, in fact, they overwhelmed the publishing industry to such an extent that, in Jany Berretti's words, 'la traduction de Baudelaire pour certains contes de Poe a réussi à confisquer entièrement l'attention des lecteurs français, à représenter pour eux l'œuvre entière de l'écrivain américain.'⁵ Rather, it means that the reading success of Poe's French translations was anticipated, orchestrated, and regulated to a great extent by the actual way in which Baudelaire commented upon the translations.

⁵ Jany Berretti, 'E. A. Poe en traduction française: Questions méthodologiques', in *Revue de littérature comparée*, 2 (avril-juin 1989), pp. 189-96 (p. 190).

Furthermore, Baudelaire's magnetic discourse on Poe weighed upon the early stages of Poe scholarship and especially the comparative discussion of their relation by misguiding it into the *fausse piste* of looking for traces of the supposed influence of Poe on Baudelaire's own poetry – non-existent, as it turned out.⁶ Even in the form of fallacies such as these, the radiance of Baudelaire's project is beyond doubt.

The second reason, connected to the first one, is that the metatexts⁷ he provided for that purpose are essential as a type of annotation that envelops the translations, clarifies and enhances their purpose, and thus facilitates the introduction of the figure of Poe to the French literary setting. Berretti uses the term 'traduction partielle' to indicate that Baudelaire translated certain tales and omitted others without in the least affecting their reception by the French who even today believe that 'cette traduction [...] représente à elle seule toute la production de l'écrivain américain';⁸ and he concludes, a few lines further down, that the text resulting from these 'partial' translations 'doit apparemment sa victoire aux préfaces qui l'accompagnèrent'. The third reason for the prioritisation of Baudelaire's criticism is that the elite audience that the thesis has identified as remote readers of the Baudelairean project (i.e. Williams, Eliot and Huxley) appear to have reacted to the critical terms of Poe's rehabilitation in France. Thus, the thesis responds to considerations of the reception of the translations, of semiotic or stylistic nature.⁹ In a

⁶ P. Mansell Jones, 'Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarmé: A Problem of Literary Judgment', in *The Background of Modern French Poetry. Essays and Interviews* (Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 38-58; see also Régis Michaud, 'Baudelaire et Edgar Poe: Une mise au point', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 44 (1938), 666-83; Éléonore M. Zimmermann, 'Mallarmé et Poe: précisions et aperçus', *Comparative Literature*, 6 (1954), 304-15; W. T. Bandy, 'Baudelaire et Poe: Vers une nouvelle mise au point', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 67: 2 (avril-juin 1967), 329-34; Richard M. Chadbourne, 'The Generation of 1848: Four Writers and their Affinities', *Essays in French Literature*, 5 (November 1968), 1-21; David J. Kelley, 'Delacroix, Ingres et Poe: Valeurs picturales et valeurs littéraires dans l'œuvre critique de Baudelaire', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 71: 4 (juillet – août 1971), 606-14.

⁷ Descriptive notions such as 'meta-texts', literary 'teachings', and 'education' are standard in reception studies; for their use, see Anton Popovič, 'Aspects of Metatext', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 3: 1-3 (1976), 225-235, as well as Anton Popovič and Francis M. Macri, 'Literary Synthesis', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 4: 1-3 (Winter 1977) 117-132.

⁸ Berretti, 'Poe en traduction française', p. 191.

⁹ The particular design was also motivated by the way in which Edward Said introduced his notion of style as 'the recognizable, repeatable, preservable sign of an author who reckons with an audience'; Said asserts, in this respect, that 'the author's style is partially a

way, this focus eclipses the translational aspect in order to show how Baudelaire's critical texts made his fascination with Poe more striking and stressed it unwaveringly for his readers. It is in this sense that his critical writing, which contains various sub-genres, comes to fortify the invocation of readership effected in the translations, and thus becomes a strategy of 'littérisation':¹⁰ the notion is coined to suggest that translation is not simply an operation of going from one language to another, but a form of literary recognition by a prestigious literary system, and as such is particularly relevant to receptions studies' projects. In Baudelaire's case, and in a manner consonant with the norms prevalent in his day, he re-contextualises the original work for his audience, assigns experiential value to it and thus makes it intelligible in its new discursive context.

Therefore, the relation between critical assortment and translation was the first one to be specified within the framework of the present thesis: the critical writing represented Baudelaire's attempt to anticipate a reception of the translations that nineteenth-century mass market logistics made intermittent and fragmentary - indeed to preclude these fragmentation effects. Simply put, Baudelaire had to foreground his individual intention amidst other agents of signification in order to promote his own reading of Poe's work for the new, French audience. The textual analysis of part I will show how Poe's aesthetic worth becomes the object of disputing claims as Baudelaire's narrating voice confidently negotiates with other competing agents: positive ones as the fabricated icon of Maria Clemm, or inimical to his purpose such as the vulgarity projected onto the American society. In relation to these instances of negotiation, one could not decide, on the basis of grammatical articulation alone, whether one is to be read to the exclusion of the other; it would be more accurate to say they are rather dramatised in Baudelaire's virtuoso orchestration, thus proving that the description of his acculturation project as 'haute vulgarisation' is poignantly accurate.

phenomenon of repetition and reception'; 'The Text, the World, the Critic', in *Textual Strategies. Perspectives in Post-Culturalist Criticism*, ed. by Josué V. Harrari (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 163.

¹⁰ Casanova, Pascale, *La république mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999), pp. 188-93. The notion of littérisation shall be more fully explored in Chapter 1, Part I.

In terms of modern-day translation criticism, Baudelaire's effort can be qualified as a performative,¹¹ a bravura gesture of cultural re-production that exploits the discrepancy between the subject of proposition and the subject of enunciation, a semiotic distinction which was succinctly explained by Homi Bhabha:

The linguistic difference that informs any cultural performance is dramatized in the common semiotic account of the disjuncture between the subject of proposition (*énoncé*) and the subject of enunciation, which is not represented in the statement but which is the acknowledgment of its discursive embeddedness and address, its cultural positionality, its reference to a present time and a specific space. The act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement.¹²

This should corroborate the decision to focus on Baudelaire's criticism rather than his actual translations; the design of the thesis gives an auxiliary status to the translations proper so as to bring out the transatlantic impact of a reading that was mainly embodied in Baudelaire's critical pieces. That being the case, the expression 'Baudelaire's project' has a double semiotic value. By the time we reach part II, it is used in a non-literal way; readers are encouraged to regard it as a comprehensive category encompassing its successful reception within not only the French but also the European geo-space. It is with such a loaded, combined weight that it will come into contact with the early twentieth-century Anglophone discourses of Williams, Eliot, and Huxley, in what appears to be its second cultural activation in critical time. Theirs are mediated responses to Baudelaire's project which marks a turning point in Poe's reception in recent Anglophone criticism.

The second point about the texts selected concerns the reasons that made the Anglophone critical metatexts of Aldous Huxley, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams an obvious choice, besides their explicit reference to Baudelaire and/or his overall impact. In short, their personal involvement in post-Great War modernistic

¹¹ It is important to point out that the discursive notion of 'performative' resulted in empowering the translator's voice, and gave vent to ideologically-loaded translation accounts, of which the feminist is a characteristic example; see Theo Hermans, *Translation in Systems. Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1999), p. 158; Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation. Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London: Routledge, 1996).

¹² 'The Commitment to Theory', *New Formations*, 5 (Summer 1988), 5-23 (p. 20)

agendas, predominant in Western-Europe, their transatlantic trajectories¹³ and domiciles, primed them ideally to take in Baudelaire's act of co-optation. In a sense, these writers of poetry and prose were not free to dislike Poe, nor were they free to insulate themselves from Baudelaire's bravura move by simply falling back on the handed down marginalisation of Poe in American letters: it was imperative for them to acknowledge the public opening up of his meaning that Baudelaire brought about. Especially in the cases of Eliot and Huxley, their somewhat vexed recognition of the French appraisal is an interesting symptom of what is known in film studies as 'auteur theory' or 'politique des auteurs' - an intellectual attitude valorising a representation of the world 'as it is seen under the pressure of a personal vision'.¹⁴ In this respect, it is besides the point to simply dismiss these readings as being elitist or lacking wider support, something that was indeed true back then as it is true today.¹⁵ By initiating a dialogue with the auteur Baudelaire had become in self-conscious modernistic communities by the time these writers articulated their aesthetic positions, they kick-started a debate that concerned the public meaning of a literary work that used to belong, as far as its domestic canonical perception was concerned, to the domain of facile magazine literature. The results Baudelaire achieved single-handedly can be clearly read in their evaluative pronouncements. Historically, as the setting of the thesis fully illustrates, the negotiation of Poe's public meaning was essentially grafted on Baudelaire's private imagining of him, whose prestige bore upon these critics' decision to initiate an equally prestigious reclamation of Poe in the name of national letters.

The abstract system into which these instances are arranged is certainly interlinguistic and transatlantic in that it traces a trajectory that moves outward, from Baudelaire's original (meaning both the source text and the figure of Poe) to his target (French) literature and culture. But it also takes another, less evident route,

¹³ Henry James relevantly refers to his own trips between America and Europe as a 'shuttle experience'.

¹⁴ For a brief introduction to the philosophical 'personalism' that underpins the concept and a sparkling account of one case of its transatlantic traffic, see Louis Menand, 'Paris, Texas. How Hollywood Brought the Cinema Back from France', *New Yorker*, 17 & 24 February 2003, pp. 169-77 (pp. 170, and 172-73).

¹⁵ For the methodological difficulties in literary criticism when it comes to include non-privileged classes of readers, see the Introduction to Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the*

homeward bound this time, going from Baudelaire's translational project to the domestic context, although not Poe's contemporary one: it concentrates on the post-Baudelairean, Anglo-American criticism assessing Poe's importance in the light of the French poet's figuration of him. The object of study, therefore, concerns two isolated moments in Poe's reception, one translational the other domestic, which are taken to be interlinked and are accordingly pitted against one another. These meta-readings of Poe's work are not assessed with relation to their original, as they might have been, but as reflecting one another. By connecting the two disparate moments of reception, the thesis seeks to puzzle out the effects a successful acculturation project like Baudelaire's had on a context other than the targeted one. The overriding assumption of the thesis is that the notion of Poe that Eliot, Williams and Huxley had in mind was fused with the original of Baudelaire's work (a French, as it were, Poe): in other words, the Baudelairean project was the first stage of Poe's symbolic repatriation, half a century later. This project is taken to be the condition or motor for the pronouncements of these three critics, their genetic reason as well as the principle of their articulation. The textual evidence picks up what Poe scholarship only alluded to, namely that it was a 'corrupted', refracted Poe that acquired increased cultural currency in the first half of the twentieth century and, as such, attracted considerable attention in Americanist critical discourse. It is, in reality, no exaggeration to say that the French Poe became a critical lodestar for transatlantic understanding in terms of 'enigma', 'scandal', or simply - but powerfully - as an invitation to delve into and subvert notions of mono-national literary criticism.

Therefore, although the starting point is Baudelaire's attempt to compose for his French audiences an all-encompassing 'book' of Poe involving the translation of the majority of his tales and a number of bio-critical accompaniments, the thesis' setting has to exceed the translational framework. This excess has a double sense, evident not only with respect to Baudelaire's original but also with respect to his own cultural context; the frame of reference that the thesis establishes, in other words, is

Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller, tr. by John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

neither Poe¹⁶ nor the receiving community of Baudelaire's translations. In this respect, the case study has a design atypical of translation studies, even though it draws on its state of the art. A major implication of the translation studies' outlook, which in the nineteenth seventies tilted the balance away from the primacy of the original, is that translations can only affect the target literature – a point famously made by Walter Benjamin too.¹⁷ Reluctance to embrace a scope that exceeds monocultural frames of investigation was, accordingly, the single factor that decided against a more mainstream translation design. Its rationale would be that in order to describe the translated work systematically,¹⁸ in terms of its material embeddedness, we are eventually compelled to resurrect the opposition between source and target text, and be content with the functional integration of translation in its receiving context.¹⁹ The constraining frame of this type of reasoning emerges in the writings of the second generation of theorists who were trained in polysystem operations,²⁰ for instance:

¹⁶ For a more extensive discussion of the 'disappearance' of the original as the ultimate referent of both Baudelaire's and the Anglophone critics' horizon, and its theoretical implications, see the concluding part of the thesis.

¹⁷ 'The Task of the Translator', tr. by Harry Zohn, in *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 71-82 (p. 81).

¹⁸ The constraint is concisely formulated by Harald Kittel who introduces the premises of the 'Center for the Study of Literary Translation' established at Göttingen University in 1985: 'Studies in literary translation are usually of limited scope, focusing on individual texts and isolated phenomena, and rarely on an entire period, a body of texts, or multiple translations produced in time by different translators in different places. Few attempts have been made at comprehensive, systematic research – for obvious reasons. In the area of literary translation, investigations that are at once extensive and intensive can hardly be carried out single-handedly by individual scholars working within the confines of their traditional academic disciplines. Instead, cooperation and interdisciplinary approaches encompassing as many languages, literatures and cultures as possible appear promising'; 'Inclusions and Exclusions: The "Göttingen Approach" to Translation Studies and Inter-Literary History', in *Translating Literatures Translating Cultures. New Vistas and Approaches in Literary Studies*, ed. by Kurt Mueller-Vollmer and Michael Irmscher (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 3-13 (p. 4).

¹⁹ See Claudio Guillén, *Literature as System. Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton University Press, 1971); Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure. Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972).

²⁰ Polysystem theory, the name under which the descriptive branch of translation studies is also known as, sought to establish the translated literature within the target system, literary and cultural; see Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995).

Yet no translator or institutional initiator of a translation can hope to control or even be aware of every condition of its production. And no agent of a translation can hope to anticipate its every consequence, the uses to which it is put, the interests served, the values it comes to convey. Nonetheless, it is these conditions and consequences that offer the most compelling reasons for discriminating among the stakes involved in translating and reading translations.²¹

The limitations implied in attempts to give a systematic description of translated literature became obvious in the first stages of the present research whose entry point was Baudelaire's framing of his translations: the monocultural framework had to give way to a cross-cultural landscape. In the passage quoted above, Venuti foregrounds the multiple uses that a translation project may have, its scattering effects that exceed the attempts of its initiators to control its signification and dissemination. Thus, he indicates a 'compelling' path of investigation should the conditions of a translation's varied uses and readings become the main object of study. Poe's successful Europeanisation is the problematic long-term result of a series of intertwined appropriations and counter-reactions, initiated locally by Baudelaire. It is crucial to emphasise that his appropriation of Poe was not as much an outgrowth of his attempt at homogenisation as the majority of critics suggest.²² It was rather an effect of dissemination and proliferation: thanks mainly to his unique rhetorical style, Baudelaire released a series of inherently rich, overlapping, and often competing 'emplotments'²³ which opened up an ambivalent, fraught space that just waited to be filled up by further readings. Moreover, as Baudelaire's cultural authority was gradually established in the modernist discourses of central and Western Europe, his project ended up by being projected onto a novel realm of

²¹ Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation. Towards an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 3.

²² This representation, based on an anachronistic faith in a centripetal, controlling narrative voice, is reiterated in a recent, and otherwise subtle, article on the connection between Baudelaire and Poe that, yet again, stressed the time-honoured, spiritual affiliation between the two poets; see Elizabeth Duquette, "'The Tongue of an Archangel': Poe, Baudelaire, Benjamin", *Translation and Literature*, 12: 1 (Spring 2003), pp. 18-40 (pp. 20-23).

²³ For the notion, see Hayden V. White, 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', in *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 81-100. Cf. Clifford Geertz, "'From the native's point of view': On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding", in *Culture Theory. Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*, ed. by Richard A. Shweder and Robert A. Levine (Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 123-36.

signification causing a further wave of counter-reactions: the improbable transculturation²⁴ occurred when the Anglocentric criticism of the early nineteen thirties eventually reacted to the French gesture of co-optation - an instance that further scattered Poe's cultural value.

The transatlantic handling of Poe offers, therefore, an ideal setting, especially in its post-translational manifestations: they make visible the overdeterminacy which inheres in Baudelaire's translation project by providing blatant instances of literary manipulation fraught with sizzling, unwarranted effects. Once the receptive context is perceived to be bicultural, it readily throws new light on the Anglo-American pronouncements as an oblique, unforeseen culmination of Baudelaire's campaign: Poe's literary status, a notion unheard of before Baudelaire, becomes finally in these influential Americanist essays the main object of debate. Thus, the enabling condition for the design of the thesis was the identification of the three Anglophone readings as a remote, spill-over effect of Baudelaire's project. The French face that Poe was given by his translator and acculturator comes into focus, the thesis argues, in the post-Great-War writings of Eliot, Williams and Huxley.

If we phrase the hypothesis in this way we set in motion a type of reverse mechanism whereby Baudelaire's project is studied in the light of effects it could not have possibly anticipated or predicted given that they occurred in a context remote from him in space and time. This reverse interconnection has specific implications. Even though chronological order is still maintained, Baudelaire's project is to be thematised and discussed according to the types of cultural uses that his readers - Williams, Eliot and Huxley - actually opted for. My analysis of it is not open-ended, but predetermined by those factors that are going to polarise the discussion of Poe's literary significance in early twentieth-century criticism. If the French Poe was what impelled Huxley, Williams and Eliot to ponder on the implications of his new-found and insistently defended glorification, then it is necessary to examine the terms whereby Baudelaire formulated and propagated it in his articles. Given that this peculiar, hybrid original was the barometer of their critical astonishment, the way in

²⁴ The concept was proposed, in the realm of critical anthropology, by Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 6-7.

which Baudelaire recounts Poe's work, life and importance can shed some light on his distant interlocutors.

The findings of rhetorical analysis in part I are accordingly processed and organised in such a way as to bring to the surface 'the naturalized, concealed frames of intelligibility that enable cultural enunciation'²⁵ in the case of the three critics that form the object of study in part II. In reductive terms, the findings regarding the translational and critical representation of Poe by Baudelaire are *aligned* to the representations given by Huxley, Williams and Eliot. When, in the first three chapters, I discuss in detail notions of audiencehood, textuality and dramatisation, as well as the spectral idea of the original to-be-translated and appropriated, I do so because these axes might plausibly account for the particular ways in which Huxley, Williams, and Eliot responded to the French project. The same stands for the thorny theme of Poe's cultural alienation: to a large extent, his appropriation by Baudelaire is made in terms of a highly individualised literary figure, a discrete and stable self clearly opposed to a non-self, tantamount to the 'American' personality.²⁶ It is common knowledge in Poe scholarship that the post-Baudelairean mythologisation of Poe is due to the facility with which the narrative turns him into a cultural orphan who is then readily embraced by an affiliated spirit, that of his translator, his 'brother'.²⁷ It is against such a move that the Anglo-American critics' mounting discourse of nativity, either defensive or destructive, becomes meaningful. Their taking hold of a central position in relation to the American literary establishment, predominantly as native speakers of English, defines more or less their views of the challenging image of Poe propounded by Baudelaire. This is the central hypothesis of the thesis.

However, there is a certain amount of selection, manipulation and unforeseeable extrapolation in the manner in which the transatlantic negotiation is conducted - which also speaks of the limitations of the model I have chosen. The

²⁵ Madhava Prasad, 'On the Question of a Theory of (Third World) Literature', quoted in *Between Languages and Cultures. Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*, ed. by Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), p. 21.

²⁶ The theme is summarised in the expression characterising Poe as 'le Byron égaré dans un mauvais monde'; see Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) II: p. 322.

actual juxtaposition of one another's discourses in such a way as to reflect their respective presuppositions and values does not exhaust the meanings actually propagated in the course of each critical act. If Baudelaire's project has 'exceeded' conceptually the belittling contents attributed to Poe by the Antebellum American literary establishment, the accounts given by the Anglophone critics in question are bound to overwhelm it critically. These accounts seem to be motivated by preoccupations of a scope and nature that are not coterminous with Baudelaire's framing of Poe's meaning, although it anchors their transatlantic curiosity;²⁸ as part II of the thesis illustrates, Williams, Huxley and Eliot rather take the opportunity to redefine or crystallise founding notions of American letters. They render visible Baudelaire's contending representation of Poe while at the same time expressing an anxious interest in the notion of linguistic nativity as an index of literariness: they raise questions such as what is native in Poe, how his work fortifies or upsets the native element, whether a foreign perception is valid or not and, consequently, how the notion of nativity, in its most basic sense, legitimises attribution of aesthetic value. Thus, Baudelaire's account becomes for them an 'uninitiate reading' whose erroneous nature is instrumental in their effort to stabilise the American literary canon.²⁹ These writings are important indexes of Poe's transatlantic education inasmuch as they position themselves against Baudelaire's deviant discourse and claim, as native speakers of English, to occupy a central position in literary hierarchy.

²⁷ Anthony Pym, 'The Historical Failure of Brotherhood in International Cultural Regimes', *History of European Ideas*, 16: 1-3 (January 1993), 123-30.

²⁸ This point of view constitutes the thesis' 'enabling moment' in the sense that Edward Said gave to anthropology's encounter with non-Western epistemologies, a moment contained by the colonial situation; see 'Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (Winter 1989), 205-25 (p. 211-12).

²⁹ The rhetorical evidence accumulated, especially in the cases of Eliot and Huxley, corroborate Frank Kermode's arguments about the processes by which institutional interpretation ensures the establishment and flexible adaptation of their canons. He argues, indicatively, '[t]he desire to have a canon, more or less unchanging, and to protect it against charges of inauthenticity or low value... is an aspect of the necessary conservatism of a learned institution', a point which connects to his other assertion - most relevant for the case under study - about the need of the canonisation process to solidify itself 'against an heretical attempt'; 'Institutional Control of Interpretation', *Essays on Fiction, 1971-1982* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 168-84 (pp. 173 and 172).

I shall take occasion here to make an important point which concerns the propitious intricacy of comparative alignment as a method of discovery. Given that the two moments of Poe's literary education are not symbiotic in any real sense, the option of the Anglophone critics to relate their writings to the French reception is voluntaristic, strongly overdetermined: this means to say that the transatlantic slant they opted for does not come about naturally, or effortlessly but is the offspring of a series of presuppositions that need to be explored as such. Unlike, say, the postcolonial situation which presupposes 'zones of contact', the transatlantic relationship of these prestigious Anglophone and Francophone readers is not regulated by any obvious determinism: their chronicles breathe and circulate in a heterogeneous space where basic choices must be made. Therefore, to align the two discourses, as the present thesis does, is eventually to bring sharply the asymmetries they embody to focus. The title of the thesis illustrates the central role of 'reflective operations': but if the employed trope of 'reflection' connotes, in general speech, a neat and tidy representation of reception phenomena, before long the illusion is dissipated in the pronouncedly seamy operations of manipulation that the Anglophone essays perform with relation to the French discourse. When accordant and discordant opinions are framed together, a certain degree of combativity comes about that would not have been visible had they been portrayed in relative isolation.³⁰

This element of sustained antagonism that rubs off on discourses which, as a rule, wish to appear dispassionate, promises to offer some illuminative vistas which were not fully anticipated in the initial comparative format of the hypothesis. In other words, the benefits of practicing transatlantic comparativism – 'a strategy to fracture the boundaries of established institutions and scholarly disciplines' in Paul Giles's words³¹ – are real and need to be clearly pronounced against fantasies of symmetry and harmony; to put this differently, the model is eventually bound to be transformed by its findings. When it is postulated that the jarring French judgment of Poe is a

³⁰ Journalist Jules Huret gave an insightful account of these tensions and limitations when he put together an inquiry into nineteenth-century French literature on the basis of interviews with influential French *littérateurs* of his time (3d of March to 5th of June 1891, for the magazine *L'Echo de Paris*). In his introduction, he stresses both the advantages of the 'combativité raisonnée' that underpins any comparative, oppositional arrangement, and its necessarily inexhaustive nature; *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, pp. 19-26.

suitable context of signification for a number of modernist Anglophone discourses, the chief ideological presupposition is, in essence, a faith in the productivity of reciprocal critical operations. This is an article of faith central to transnational agendas.³² In this respect, the thesis took two steps: first, it diminished the distance separating the critical treatises assuming that this distance represents, more than anything else, a cognitive category sanctioned by mono-national epistemologies; the second step was facilitated by the 'forced' intimacy of the format, which began to reveal the concealed terms of the transatlantic debate, namely evidence of textual hybridity. The discursive negotiations with Baudelaire's claim to define and assess American literature took the shape of numerous hybrid rhetorical moments in all three essays. As the concluding chapter of the present work makes clear, the hybridity of voices in evidence in the Anglophone writings came about by their inclusive awareness of the 'untutored reading' of Baudelaire.³³ Hybridity is a form of critical utterance which can be trusted to perform – especially in the case of a 'canonist' like Eliot (as Frank Kermode described him) – a long overdue, unsettling influence on disciplinary borders.

Operations such as these helped to shape and fix the thesis' overarching goal which can best be described as a conflation of content and method. The meaning of this conflation becomes evident once it is seen against a series of theoretical debates that have in recent years caused a novel approach to inter-cultural phenomena to be proposed in the humanities. The setting of the thesis stands very close to the transatlantic paradigm that seems likely to become 'the staple of a new pattern of consensus', to use a phraseology that describes operations of canon formation.³⁴ The transatlantic initiative is summarized in the editorial introduction of the first *Transatlantic Studies* volume. One of its programmatic goals is 'to locate the common issues and concerns that necessarily move us beyond disciplinary and monocultural perspectives'; consequently, it tries not to 'disentangle the threads of

³¹ 'Trans Atlantic', 23 pp. (plenary address at the first conference of the Center for Transatlantic Studies, Maastricht, 12 October 2000), p. 2.

³² See, for instance, Lucien Fabre, 'Frontière: the word and the concept', in *A New Kind of History and Other Essays*, ed. by Peter Burke, tr. by K. Folca (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973), pp. 208-18.

³³ For the expression, see Tony Bennett, 'Text, Readers, Reading Formations', *Literature and History*, 9: 2 (Autumn 1983), 214-27 (p. 224).

the strands [existing in separate area and disciplinary studies]', but rather 'to identify and highlight them in all their entanglement'.³⁵ The innovative potential of the recently formulated paradigm regarding the mapping of the humanities depends largely on comparativism, a methodological tool that should enable critical enquiry to transcend its nationalistic constraints.

The link between transatlantic studies and the comparative methodology has been lucidly demonstrated by scholars trained in the field of American studies in its current, embattled state.³⁶ A point of increasing consensus is that if the field is to be reconfigured within a transnational frame, comparative practice is found to be the deciding factor.³⁷ Reciprocal operations of criticism can, these arguments suggest, further promote the notion of context as a means of investigation in such a way as to dampen its more negative side-effects as, for instance, its self-fulfilling properties. With the analytical focus on comparativism, the tool should be conceptually fixed so as to better illustrate the empowering effects it may bring about in literary criticism. In this respect and bearing in mind its special affinities with comparative literature, I take it that its most characteristic habitat is by and large translation studies.³⁸ Whereas the latter in its heyday, in nineteenth century, saw itself more as a form of

³⁴ Kermode, 'Institutional Control of Interpretation', p. 171.

³⁵ Will Kaufman and Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, eds., *Transatlantic Studies: A New Paradigm* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), p. xvii-xxii. See also Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson, and Will Kaufman, eds., 'Transatlantic Studies: Conceptual Challenges', in *New Perspectives in Transatlantic Studies* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), pp. xi-xxv.

³⁶ Robert F. Berkhofer, 'A New Context for a New American Studies?', in *American Quarterly*, 41 (1989), 588-613; Michael Cowan, 'Boundary as Center: Inventing an American Studies Culture', *Prospects*, 12 (1987), 1-20; Lawrence Buell, 'Are We Post-American Studies?', in *Field Work. Sites in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Marjorie Garber and others (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 87-92; Lauren Berlant, 'National Brands / National Body: Imitation of Lide', in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality*, ed. by Hortense Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991); Simon Frith, 'Literary Studies as Cultural Studies – Whose Literature? Whose Culture?', in *Critical Quarterly*, 34: 1 (Spring 1992), 3-26; Donald E. Pease, 'New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon', *boundary 2*, 17: 1 (Spring 1990), 1-37.

³⁷ Paul Giles, 'Reconstructing American Studies: Transnational Paradoxes, Comparative Perspectives', *Journal of American Studies*, 28: 3 (1994), 335-58 (pp. 348-355); 'Virtual Americas: The Internationalization of American Studies and the Ideology of Exchange', *American Quarterly*, 50: 3 (1998), 523-47 (pp. 527, 536).

³⁸ See, for instance, André Lefevere, 'Translation and Comparative Literature: The Search for the Center', *TTR: Languages and Cultures in Translation Theories*, 4: 1 (1991), 129-44; V. N. Iartseva, 'The Role of Translations in the History of Literary Language', *Soviet Studies in Literature*, 18: 1 (Winter 1981-82), 80-87.

ideality seeking to identify universal themes and genres,³⁹ recent comparative practice valorises a culture, or ethos of difference.⁴⁰ The fact that these fields depend increasingly for their development on their dialogue with other critical idioms – for instance, reception studies, critical linguistics⁴¹ and postcolonial criticism, to name but a few – is evidence of the productivity of comparativism in institutional terms; its common name is interdisciplinarity.

In its contemporary guise, comparativism can be restrictively defined as an abstract theoretical model which affords an unmistakable logical advantage. Abstraction is indeed a major feature of the method for to juxtapose a work to its meta-texts is basically to make relational connections, to build a system of relations which requires at least two points of reference. The critical advantage resides in that in its setting and operation, comparativism ensures a fairly controllable ideational workshop with restrictions that are structural and yet dynamic.⁴² It makes sense to argue that the revamped idiom puts emphasis not on continuity and similarity but rather on relations of separation and divergence. This is necessary in order to identify and explore circumstances, values, and assumptions which were propitious to the creation of a literary event – the event being, in this case, the cross-Atlantic acknowledgment of Poe's littérisation. The aim of juxtaposing the two perceptive repertoires is to bring out the particular relational space where similarities and, most

³⁹ Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, tr. by Cola Franzen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 24-26.

⁴⁰ Venuti, *Scandals of Translation*; Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Colonialism and the Politics of Translation', in *An Other Tongue. Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands*, ed. by Alfred Arteaga (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 35-52. See also Antoine Berman, *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne* (Éditions Gallimard, 1995), and *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999).

⁴¹ The connection between critical linguistics and translation studies was pinned down by Keith Harvey in the sense that the former 'is also struggling to produce paradigms that will allow it to relate the minutiae of textual analysis to the interactional, social and political contexts that produce language forms and upon which language forms operate'; 'Translating Camp Talk. Gay Identities and Cultural Transfer', *Translator*, 4: 2 (1998), 295-320 (p. 317). See also Roger Fowler, 'On Critical Linguistics', in *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. by Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcolm Coulthard (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁴² See Henry M. Hoenigswald, 'Descent, Perfection and the Comparative Method since Leibnitz', in *Leibnitz, Humboldt, and the Origins of Comparatism*, ed. by Tullio de Mauro and Lia Formigari (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1990), pp. 119-32; Paul Thieme, 'The Comparative Method for Reconstruction in Linguistics', in *Language in*

importantly, differences have occurred; this provides a first set of observables that could securely ground other types of comparative study, for instance enquiries about possible structural pressures which could account for these clusters of differentiated responses.

The tool is by definition highly selective, interventionist and thence potentially accountable to challenges of its disciplinary rigour. A way to respond to this concern, which is essentially a concern that the method eventually leads to critical relativism, is to carefully contextualise the points of comparison which have been previously rendered abstract for comparison purposes. In this respect, contextualisation prevents the two sites of reference and reciprocal mirroring from being readily re-edified as ideal, homogeneous entities; it thus testifies emphatically that the representations selected and discussed remain historically conditioned artefacts. Transcendent ideality looms in any critical endeavour which does not establish its objects of study within a specific frame of reference; this is the symbolic realm within which they can become meaningful for their particular receiving communities. That said, contextualisation remains an umbrella term for whatever it is that critics deem necessary to inscribe their objects of study in a semiotic 'regime',⁴³ or to make them intelligible to a particular 'interpretive community'.⁴⁴ Therefore, because contextualisation provides a restricted inlet into the work's horizon of intelligibility, we need to accompany it with comparative means: this will both disarm the self-fulfilling properties inherent in contextualisation as alluded to earlier,⁴⁵ and circumvent the hierarchical, nation-centred framework which is rightly associated with the conservative tendencies of institutionally entrenched criticism.⁴⁶

Taking into account these considerations, a case study that proclaims Baudelaire's project as the contextual frame of the twentieth-century American reception of Poe should have a twofold aim: first, to understand the transatlantic

Culture and Society. A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology, ed. by Dell Hymes (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 585-99.

⁴³ Mircea Marghescu, *Le concept de littérature. Essai sur les possibilités théoriques d'une science de la littérature* (Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 47

⁴⁴ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 167-73.

⁴⁵ Berkhofer, 'A New Context for a New American Studies?', pp. 588-89.

availability and use of this particular case - what I could call the 'content value' - and secondly, to explore the potential and limits of comparativism – what I call the 'method value'. These aims should be interlocking and mutually reinforcing. Progressing at one level should enable one to perceive the complexities manifest at the other; the model should help to highlight the intricacies of the case study and the latter should in turn promote the potentialities of the tool. The interest of the Poe case resides in the astonishing divergence between the Francophone and Anglophone receptions, recorded as early as the end of the nineteenth century in the aftermath of Baudelaire's project, and also in the ideological use of the latter as ammunition in the debate over the American Renaissance canon. I have already had the opportunity to point out that the specific reflective operations whereby the literary meaning of Poe was negotiated within different national frames makes the case particularly suited to comparativism. However, to use the comparative approach so as to accommodate the double aim suggested above is no easy task. The stakes are even higher when such a discussion is linked to the proclaimed aims of the debated transatlantic paradigm. That comparativism can be ill-served by its practitioners illustrates the intricacy involved in such a praxis.⁴⁷ With the main purpose being to juxtapose Poe's American and European receptions in order to puzzle out the workings of his commerce, the thesis sketches out a mapping of the exchange that simultaneously bears in mind the urgency of promoting the revisionist value of the comparative tool. The development of argumentation will show that the two itineraries go indeed side by side.

As pointed out above, contextualisation is not a simple problem. Context can be defined as a synonym for the social embodiment of an 'originary' text,

⁴⁶ See Daniel A. Segal, 'Nationalism, Comparatively Speaking', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1: 3 (September 1988), 301-21; James Chandler, 'Devolutionary Criticism: Scotland, America, and Literary Modernity', *Modern Philology*, 92 (1994), 211-19.

⁴⁷ An instance of such a practice is Steve Brewer's and Martin Jesinghausen's article 'European Modernity-Awareness and Transatlantic Intertextuality: Poe's Significance for Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Foucault' in *New Perspectives in Transatlantic Studies*, ed. by Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson and Will Kaufman (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), pp. 101-115. The article, which shows the exemplary importance of this case study for the transatlantic idiom, provided in effect a testing ground for my main hypothesis. I have read it, in the main, as an attempt to pursue a just premise in a methodologically erroneous way that has serious implications for the transatlantic project's demonstrative rigour and its credentials within institutional debates.

illuminated in the manner in which certain topical reading repertoires have identified therein specific clusters of meaning to which they claim to have responded. Given that translation is the material activity that determined Poe's European acculturation, it is relevant to recall Theo Hermans's discussion of the nature of the original in transfer operations:

The specific and always historically determinate way in which a cultural community construes translation [...] also determines the way in which translation, as a cultural product, refers to its source text, the kind of image of the original which the translation projects or holds up. In other words, the 'other' to which a translated text refers is *never simply the source text* [...]. *It is at best an image of it*. Because the image is always slanted, coloured, performed, overdetermined, but never innocent, we can say that translation constructs or produces [...] its original.⁴⁸

Because there is no unique, fixed or pure Poe-as-original, any critical account of his reception aspiring to build a convincing, rigorous case needs to declare how it constitutes its object. In order to maintain Hermans's caution as a structuring principle *while* analysing texts and meta-texts it is necessary to proceed to a radical 'aestheticisation' of the multifaceted object of study:⁴⁹ namely, to foreground rhetorical elements in the text under study which could reasonably account for the translational and meta-translational representations formed in historical time and space. Consequently, these are revitalised as 'sites of exchange', that is to say, reciprocities which reveal shifts of signification on the basis of opposing site-specific values.⁵⁰

Therefore, in order to proceed with contextualisation *and* comparison in transnational fashion the first step should be to define contextualisation as a process of unveiling complexities of embodied texts; the next step is to consider the 'comparative perspective' as a procedure of unveiling complexities of embodied texts and metatexts across different media and reading communities, as well as along differentiated schemata of representation. This ad hoc definition reveals context as a

⁴⁸ Theo Hermans, 'Norms of Translation', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation*, ed. by Peter France (Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 10-15 (p. 14; *emphasis added*). See also Lieven D'hulst, 'Les variantes textuelles des traductions littéraires', *Poetics Today*, 2: 4 (Summer/Autumn 1981), 133-41.

⁴⁹ I use the notion in the sense that Paul Giles gave to it, see 'Virtual Americas', p. 544.

necessarily conflictual notion whereby the rhetorical particularities of texts are rendered transparent via speculative and explicitly interventionist close readings. Conflict appears to be the element that, most of all, structures both inter-linguistic and intra-linguistic perception, hence its prevailing role in the critical analysis that was chosen.

An important advantage of close reading is that by breaking down the texts under study in patterns revealing clusters of signification as a matter of course, it can insulate against homogenising types of understanding.⁵¹ As Susan Manning has it, 'contingency [...] does not render either history of literary history spurious or worthless; it confers particularity on universal or abstract concurrences'.⁵² Homogenising tendencies are customarily found in nation-centred literary accounts as part of their conventional critical vocabulary, but they may also infect transnational accounts.⁵³ In contrast, comparativism seeks to make its object of study a catalyst for liquidating nationally-bound typologies. In tune with such a predisposition, close reading promotes the text as a stratified discursive network embodying instructions of reading, projections to an imagined audiencehood whose response is being called upon by specific textual arrangements. This can subsequently be seen as a helpful clue for the critic's own attempt (my own as well as that of the Anglophone writers in question) at orchestrating actual readerships quite dissimilar to those that the considered works have diachronically had. Here, once again, awareness of the affinity between comparativism and translation discourse proves to be of great benefit: in particular, the liminal specificity of translation as a (re)writing activity (in its dual aspect, that of writing and reading translations) helps to posit both text and meta-text as deliberate acts of representation attempting to appeal to a new, imagined readership.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Giles, 'Reconstructing American Studies', p. 355.

⁵¹ Anthony Pym, *Negotiating the Frontier. Translators and Intercultures in Hispanic History* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2000), p. 5.

⁵² *Fragments of Union. Making Connections in Scottish and American Writings* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), p. 5.

⁵³ The tendency is manifest, for instance, in the Brewer and Jesinghausen article mentioned above which unblinkingly reshuffles a series of national categorisations, such as Poe's 'Frenchness' or his 'Europeanness' ('European Modernity-Awareness', pp. 103, 104), blind to the reificatory effect of their unreflective restatement.

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

There is, nonetheless, a sense of discomfort in following a close reading that concentrates on argumentative development and puts together conceptual and value patterns piecemeal as if unaware of what will ensue; in that sense, the method borrows the logic of a relatively recent type of biographical writing, known as the log genre.⁵⁵ Regrettably, the approach confers an air of crudity, as a result of which the texts under study begin to appear like unadulterated, authorial re-creations. Plainly, such an uncalled for effect, which could only be attenuated in the course of analysis, is sheer artifice: that much was suggested in the first paragraphs of the introduction when attention was drawn on the reverse structuring of the thesis, and the fact that there is no unmediated literary form.⁵⁶ It goes without saying that no approach to the reception of Poe's work today can possibly be unaware of its different historical stages or, equally, be unaffected by its prestigious canonisation. Therefore, the more sinister effects of a meticulously applied textual analysis had to be accepted if analysis was to reveal the extent of the critics' strategies of manipulation. With this in mind it can be argued that the slow-pacing analysis, which insists on the fragmentary and is reluctant to draw general conclusions is not cause for frustration⁵⁷ - on the contrary, it is highly desirable. It occupies in effect the 'middle ground', the liminal territory which has been explored and described by translation studies as follows:

The introduction of a descriptive level compels our discourse to *hesitate*, to linger over or circulate among a range of possibilities. Instead of rushing to specify a text's meaning in the light of a theory, the descriptive project encourages us to map out a range of possible meanings, or to seek to grasp the *conditions* of meaning in specific texts.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See, for instance, the introduction to *The Poe Log*, where it is stated that '[t]he documents excerpted in this compilation are arranged in chronological order; editorial commentary is minimal, *allowing Poe and his associates to narrate events in their own words*'; see Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson, eds., *The Poe Log. A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe, 1809-1849* (New York: Prentice Hall International, 1987), pp. ix-xiii (x); *emphasis added*.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Culler, 'Presupposition and Intertextuality', *Modern Language Notes*, 91: 6 (December 1976), 1380-96.

⁵⁷ For a more detailed discussion of this methodological aspect, see the Conclusion of the thesis.

⁵⁸ Brian McHale, 'Whatever Happened to Descriptive Poetics?', in *The Point of Theory. Practices of Cultural Analysis*, ed. by Mieke Bal and Inge Boer (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994), pp. 56-65 (p. 65).

This 'middle range, the awkward in-between level',⁵⁹ where the expository part of the thesis is situated, has begun to attract the critical attention of other idioms of subversive potential in the humanities, with postcolonial criticism leading the way. My attempt to describe the two national repertoires which have recorded two characteristic moments in Poe's re-evaluation in modern times has all the features of an exploratory, tentative discourse which is not in any hurry to make macro-scale inferences. Nonetheless, these do come about as the impassive description has to coexist with the rather impassioned programmatic platforms which ground the critics' writings. In the case of Baudelaire it is the 'anti-American' design whereas in the cases of Eliot and Huxley it is the defence of linguistic nativity as an aesthetic criterion - thence considerably contrasting with Williams's attempt at redefining the local. When these bellicose programmatic statements are put next to the actual rhetorical articulation of their texts, the results are truly revealing. The analysis goes on to establish that when the critic moves to disarm, constrict, or do away with the competing representation (which is, in the main, inter-cultural), a number of hybrid moments transpire in his narrative. Although it is very likely that these moments are far from exhausting the terrain of investigation, they nonetheless constitute the main finding of this comparative exercise, and confirm the heuristic potential of its descriptive module. The pattern of textual hybridity they suggest announces or confirms, depending from where one looks at it, the proper site of transatlantic literary exchanges: this is predominantly a middle ground, and the cultural traffic it encourages on its uncharted territory indeed conflates content and method in actual practice.

The interface I have foregrounded between contextualisation and comparativism is what lies behind my decision to connect the writings of Baudelaire and those of the Anglophone authors, and to align the findings of close reading; what has principally enabled such a state of affairs is the necessarily mercurial nature of a literary fortune within the horizon of its recorded history. In this light, the pseudo-initial context, namely Baudelaire's project which fixed Poe's meaning within its own discursive community, was regarded as a singular image that was subsequently aligned with its reception. To assume reciprocal operations in translation phenomena

⁵⁹ Hermans, *Translation in Systems*, p. 160.

and their necessary enlargement, viz. reception phenomena in the artificially lucid frame of comparativism is to illuminate the situated values that belie one nationally-minded perception to the eyes of the other. The operations of reflection and negotiation that were already visible between the two repertoires meant that these texts were particularly suited to comparative practice. In a recent talk, Lawrence Venuti has advanced a similar notion of *historicisation* in translation studies, according to which two moments in the reception of a work interrogate one another in dialogue.⁶⁰ Such parallel discoveries not only testify to the vigour and busy anarchy of this methodological outlook, but also suggest a gap in mutual disciplinary recognition.

We need to assess the discovery potential that such an arrangement holds in proportion. Certainly, the descriptive model can only be invigorated within the framework of comparative contextualisation. The pursuit of more 'content' in describing texts, especially canonical ones, within one another's spectrum of intelligibility pushes this peculiar logic to its extremes. The findings have most certainly satisfied the criterion of heuristic connections between the writings of Baudelaire, Williams, Eliot and Huxley, but the 'method value' placed at the top of the agenda still presents a type of deficit that needs to be uttered. To borrow Keith Harvey's relevant statement, '[t]he challenge is to find a way not just to *situate* discourse in its interactional and cultural settings, but to give the relationship between setting and discourse the force of causality'.⁶¹ Such a causal connection has not been attempted here. I have already pointed out that the thesis relied on a limited number of cultural premises of mainly functional value that were not further explored nor substantiated. For instance, the differential pivot of linguistic nativity in the three Anglophone critics was taken to be an integral part of modernist literary milieus; another was the assumption that Baudelaire's emplotment of Poe's biography was not, in essence, in breach of the stylistic norms of his time. It goes without saying that such assumptions require a more thorough substantiation on the

⁶⁰ 'Translation, Theory, Identity', paper given at the second workshop of the series Translations and Translation Theories East and West: Translation Across Cultures, UCL, London, 19-20 June 2002.

⁶¹ Harvey, 'Translating Camp Talk', p. 317. For the nuances of *situatedness* in critical discourse, see Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (Fall 1988), 575-99.

basis of historical and social investigative methods. Such a path, which on a practical level calls for resources and training I do not have, would also entail a shift in the focus of my thesis. Even though the general layout of my thesis should suffice to discount such misgivings, there is an important point still to be made. My conviction is that by keeping in view such macro-cultural trends - unsophisticated though this might be for, say, a trained historian - not only does not deduct from its illuminating potential, but it also keeps the analysis of textual inflections I have advocated throughout the thesis relevant to the issues debated. Although sketchy in its manner of alluding to connections between text and context, the comparative perspective I have adopted can only be beneficial for both textual and non-textual practices of literary criticism. It is in this sense that the thesis joins, for instance, the argument of Amy Kaplan that '[i]nstead of using other disciplines as background, a historical criticism might study the implicit dialogues embedded within literary texts, dialogues with other cultural narratives and modes of representation'.⁶² The suggestiveness and innovative impulse of the comparative perspective should enable new ways of reading canonised literature and criticism, and should make available new hypotheses for further investigation. Thus, even if the relational system that the thesis propounded were only to provide a testing ground for a materially-minded research design, I would still consider that it achieved its aim.

⁶² 'Absent Things in American Life', *Yale Review*, 74: 1 (November 1984), 126-35 (p. 132).

Chapter Summary

Part I. A refracted Poe

Chapter 1. Presenting the Poe project

The ultimate goal of the investigation in Part I being to establish the particular form of cultural impersonation that Poe's translator chose, Chapter I illustrates the different ways in which Baudelaire negotiates types of audiencehood with respect to his French translations. By using two narrative genres – the translator's note and the filial letter (to Maria Clemm) – Baudelaire advances two different plot lines for his readers to identify with - one tending to the particularistic, the other towards the universal. Because the analysis sought to promote the rhetorical terms of his response to contradictory cultural pressures, special attention was given so as not to solidify notions of a privileged, self-enclosed translating self. The interplay between universal and nationalistic inflections informs his biographical/critical discourse which constitutes an ingenious reply to the need facing any translation project – namely, how to authenticate its discourse. The basic premise of this type of inquiry is that the 'loss of positionality' which is fabricated by the translator in his notes firmly anchors the centrality of Baudelaire's project in Poe's later repatriation debates.

Chapter 2. The spectral original of Baudelaire

Chapter 2 establishes the 'ghostly' quality of Baudelaire's original, that is to say, the imaginative manner in which he shapes the representation of Poe for the French public. I shall argue that he construes, to this end, a multi-layered narrative of overlapping dualities: he contrasts, first, his initial and subsequent mental images of the author and, then, the domestic (American) and foster (French) perceptions of him. It is within this system of opposites that he goes on to place his obsessive, spectral idea of the original which at the same time becomes the object of a gesture of aesthetic reinstatement. As a result, the entire enterprise acquires hues befitting a messianic effort of redemption voiced by a creative, brotherly imagination which undoubtedly seeks to appropriate Poe but does so in the name of a (higher) notion of targeted audience, that of the 'French memory'.

Chapter 3. Papery Poe

Chapter 3 completes the mapping of the polymorphous project that Poe became for Baudelaire. The mode of representation that more than anything else summarises his project, according to the focus of the present study, is textuality; the principle needs to be understood as distinguished from the straightforward, referential manner in which Baudelaire's critical texts on Poe are usually read. The particular brand of textualisation employed here is expressed in a series of significant dramatic episodes that illustrate the grandiose scale of Poe's portrayal: namely, an exquisite subjective self contrasted with a mega-scale entity, America. By drumming attention to Poe as an alienated poet, Baudelaire formulates a theme that is going to prove, with hindsight, a catalyst for the remote attempts of canonical Anglophone writers to define American letters oppositionally. Against this general premise, the particular aim in this chapter is to show how this powerful theme comes about, in Baudelaire's narrative, in the midst of competing claims frequently undermining his proclaimed effort to ennoble Poe. Textual analysis demonstrates that the putative marginality of Poe is in effect only one of the after-effects of the project; as Baudelaire orchestrates heterogeneous voices, he both chastises and re-enacts preconceptions about American society current in the Second Empire.

Part II. Poe francised

Chapter 1. William Carlos Williams defending Poe

Chapter I of Part II shows that William Carlos Williams's construction of Poe's status is based on the acknowledgment of the critical break that the French teaching of him constitutes. In his essay Williams re-enacts the break on two levels, the level of rhetoric and critical terminology. The former concerns a series of hybrid utterances that relive a middle ground where the foreign is being freely negotiated by the native. The second level concerns a systemic account of the foreign reception in terms of surface and depth - an account which brings about a second wave of hybrid narrative instances. These instances are manipulated by Williams in his attempt to revisit notions of Americanness and, eventually, to interrupt American self-

perception in terms of unanalysed national belonging. As he stages an intricate collapse of the thematic content of Poe's work into his own actuality, taking the opportunity offered to him by the foreign reading, Williams eventually goes on to ascribe a novel signification to Poe: this is equal to a novel definition of locality.

Chapter 2. T. S. Eliot's fantasy of Poe

In Chapter 2, T. S. Eliot seeks to attenuate and eventually disarm the disquieting effect of the French reception by integrating it into an abstracted binary scheme stemming not from the historical reception of Poe but from the 'mind of the critic'. The native and the foreign perceptions occupy, in his transatlantic account, two converse positions which are complementary semiotically and ontologically: this is how Eliot affirms Poe's work as a piece of transcendental identity. The 'enigma' trope is an invitation to shy away from the actual, recorded difference in favour of a disembodied, invariant essence which needs to be reached despite differences in the work's perception. Such an elaborate account inevitably reinstalls the supremacy of the native (mainly in terms of proper language), with devastating effects not only for the way in which Eliot reconstructed the specificity of the French reading of Poe but also for the integrity of his argument. In promoting linguistic purity and correctness, his discourse showcases how the principles of Enlightenment fail outright when they attempt to account for the positive contents of a divergent literary repertory.

Chapter 3. Aldous Huxley: Defining vulgarity, prescribing disruption

The last chapter shows Aldous Huxley's figuration of Poe to be grounded on a commonsensical notion of linguistic nativity in both bi-centric and mono-centric terms. The first facet includes not only a language of dismissal with respect to the foreign perception but also, inadvertently, its positive re-inscription; the narrative incorporation of the divergent teaching results in a striated view of Poe's work that eventually reveals nativity as a narrow concept incapable of defending its legitimacy over the non-native claims. The narrative slippages of Huxley's language become fully meaningful once examined in close juxtaposition with Eliot's comparative terms. The second, mono-centric facet of Huxley's essay relies heavily on a quasi-

formal poetic analysis to prove Poe's vulgarity. The fetishisation of craftsmanship by Huxley is accounted for as a reflex denying the radical alteration of Romantic poetics in times of mass capitalism. Furthermore, the idea of vulgarity he uses is shown to be culturally induced, as artistic ideality is arrested by generalised anxiety and spurs contradictory discourses on literary sincerity. However, the submission of the transnational to the mono-national perspective he seems to be advocating can be undermined by an alternative reading of his essay, according to which nationally-centred criticism utterly depends on its foreign disruptions in order for literature to maintain its archetypal 'right to shock'.

PART I

Baudelaire's project: a refracted Poe

Chapter 1. Presenting the Poe project

The general aim of this part is to retrieve the Baudelairean encounter with Edgar Allan Poe as a singular discursive event that came to function as the inevitable first stage of Poe's literary education in twentieth-century American letters. This formulation implies a challenge to the extent that the official account of Baudelaire's project tends to think of it not as an anomaly but rather as a normal occurrence in the history of Franco-American cultural exchanges. Inevitably, an attempt to examine its articulation against the critical vagaries of transatlantic literary commerce goes in a sense against the grain of the institutional canonisation of the matter. The comparative literature canon, for instance, has integrated to a large extent the success of Baudelaire's project by eclipsing the terms and stakes it embodies, and by taking on most of the mystifications that the contemporary and immediately subsequent to Baudelaire's time criticism fell for.

The Baudelairean project by which Poe was forcibly established in the French literary system comprises translation and criticism. Baudelaire translated the majority of Poe's work and wrote three extensive critical pieces (basically prefaces and introductions) on his life and work, in a project that was much celebrated in the literature of the period as well as in more recent reception studies. If the translations installed Poe in the French letters materially, the critical facet has given him a social existence, an organic frame of intelligibility that was largely based on the figuration of Poe as the archetypal alienated artist. Although both aspects are integral part to Baudelaire's project of ennobling Poe, as well as the major reason for its success, the second guise of the project fusing the biographical and the critical will, nonetheless, be the exclusive object of study of part I; the term I will be using throughout Part I to designate it is 'Baudelaire's project'. This focus is the result of semiotic and receptive considerations that have been laid out in the introductory chapter. Because the modernist Anglo-American discourse is posited as the ultimate receptor of his project, it was inevitable that its translation facet had to be eclipsed.¹ Its success

¹ The translational aspect of Baudelaire's project became recently the object of a doctoral thesis: see Laurent Semichon, 'Charles Baudelaire's Translations of Edgar Allan Poe'

being unquestionable, the critical accompaniment is here largely regarded as a summary of the purposes that the translations serve, but also as a performative act stating how these translations and the original author is to be perceived by French readers. The existing Poe scholarship proves that the reading instructions that the critical metatexts incorporate have been indeed acknowledged, perused and canonised by Baudelaire's readers, on both sides of the Atlantic.

The chief premise of the inquiry is that the deliberate 'loss of positionality'² that the translator fabricated in his notes in order to authenticate his translations firmly places his project in the position of a catalyst for posterior, cross-Atlantic debates surrounding Poe's worth. The ultimate goal of the investigation being to establish the particular form of his cultural impersonation, Chapter I will illustrate the different ways in which Baudelaire negotiates types of audiencehood with respect to his French translations. He uses two narrative genres – the translator's note and the filial letter (to Maria Clemm), and he advances two different plot lines for his readers to take up, one tending towards the particularistic, the other towards the universal. To be sure, such an interplay responds to the need of a translation project to authenticate itself, although it can be argued that due to the extent of Baudelaire's manipulations, it exceeds its initial aim and, eventually, appropriates the work of the American author.

Therefore, Chapter I wishes to identify the terms of enunciation of Baudelaire's project, that is to say terms aiming to describe, present, and define it; central amidst them are those indicating the type of audience activated in the narrative. The underlying assumption is that the image of audience as captured in these texts constitutes a protean receiving context for Baudelaire's campaign of haute vulgarisation. To search for types of audience activated in the narrative is to acknowledge that the reading of his texts cannot take a form unmediated by the texts

(unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St. Andrews, 2003). His findings helped to confirm some of the discursive tendencies I have identified in Baudelaire's critical writings.

² I am using here a principle that was advanced as a heuristic tool in feminist discourse on identity politics, seeking to foreground the critic's social situatedness; see Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do with It?' in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, ed. by Teresa de Lauretis (Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 1986), pp. 191-212 (pp. 193-94).

themselves. The textual mediation of audience response should not be identical to authorial mediation - a principle which has been rightly criticised since the heyday of post-structuralism. Making audience markers the illuminating parameters of the enquiry is of a piece with an approach propounded by anthropology in the 1950s. In its search for the theoretical underpinnings of ethnic boundaries' building, anthropologists developed what is known as the 'ascriptive' approach; opposed to taxonomic considerations which eventually reify the object of study, this approach looks at how the actors constitute themselves, and what are the elements which are excluded and included from identification procedures as they develop a sense of national belonging and antagonism.³ This is a point of acute, as well as controversial, interest for a reflection on translation as means of cultural mediation on the highly shifting ground of literary commerce: namely, how a project articulates its aims, how it names its readership, how it formulates its projected function and value so as to appeal to the hearts and minds of its receiving, stratified community by negotiating notions of belonging, identity and loyalty with the minimum possible losses during actual reception.⁴ The question, therefore, is not one of Baudelaire's manipulation of his readership, but rather one asking 'what kinds of identifications are required or allowed' in his discourse.⁵

Accordingly and in view of the fact that the Anglophone reception of Baudelaire's performance will be largely organised in terms of national reflexes, the investigation will be focusing attention on indices of audience design as a key parameter of Baudelaire's project. This is a 'text' - including narrative types such as preface, introductory note, annotation, etc. - whereby the translator directly or

³ In the words of Fredrik Barth, one of the precursors of this current, 'ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by actors themselves, and thus have the characteristic of organizing interaction between people'; further on, he stresses that '[t]he features [of ethnic groups] that are taken into account are not the sum of "objective" differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant'; *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo: Universitets Forlaget; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), pp. 10 and 14.

⁴ Jean-Marc Gouanvic has stressed that 'the difficulties of implantation and recognition, which are globally expressed by ghettoization and subcultural marginalization, are very clear' in all translation projects; 'Translation and the Shape of Things to Come. The Emergence of American Science Fiction in Post-War France', *Translator*, 3: 2 (1997), 125-52 (p. 145).

⁵ For the quotation, see Michael Warner, 'The Mass Public and the Mass Subject', in *Habermas and the Public Space*, ed. by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991), pp. 377-402 (p. 391).

indirectly addresses his audience and, thus, offers a display piece⁶ wherein the receiving community can picture itself: for this particular study the artifice should allow us to grasp the necessary co-operation between specific narrative techniques and their intended effect. The terminology of appraisal that Baudelaire uses needs to be combined with terms of address that warrant its positive reception. These textual markers are scattered in a number of meta-texts assorting the translations: i.e. the 'Avis du traducteur', the unsent letter to Poe's mother-in-law and aunt Maria Clemm,⁷ entitled 'A Maria Clemm', and also the three 'Notices de Baudelaire' in the Pléiade edition: 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages' (1852), 'Edgar Poe, sa vie et ses œuvres' (1856), and 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe' (1857).⁸ In particular, the first two texts, 'Avis du traducteur' and 'A Maria Clemm', demand more attention as they foreground the translational capacity of the author in a more pronounced way. We can isolate, in order of appearance in his 'Avis', the following clauses as textual markers of audiencehood, directly designating the addressees of Baudelaire's translations:

- 'sincères appréciateurs des talents d'Edgar Poe'
- 'un pays comme la France'
- 'Français amis inconnus d'Edgar Poe' (*OEP*, p. 1063)

It should be pointed out that these clauses are pre-eminent for analytical purposes in that they are mentioned by the translator in connection to the entirety of Poe's work. The first two constitute a direct address:

Aux sincères appréciateurs des talents d'Edgar Poe je dirai que je considère ma tâche comme finnie, bien que j'eusse pris plaisir, pour leur plaisir, à l'augmenter encore. Les deux séries des *Histoires Extraordinaires* et des *Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaires* et les *Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym* suffisent pour présenter Edgar Poe sous ses divers aspects en tant que conteur visionnaire tantôt gracieux,

⁶ For the notion of cultural performance and display, see Clifford James, *Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 8.

⁷ See the entry 'Clemm, Maria Poe', in *The Poe Encyclopedia*, ed. by Frederick S. Frank and Anthony Magistrale (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), pp. 73-74.

⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, *Œuvres en prose*, tr. by Charles Baudelaire, ed. by Y.-G. Le Dantec (Paris: Gallimard, 1951). Hereafter abbreviated *OEP*, with page numbers in parentheses; the acronym will be used throughout the thesis.

alternativement railleur et tendre, toujours philosophe et analyste, amateur de la magie de l'absolue vraisemblance, auteur de la bouffonnerie la plus désintéressée. *Eureka* leur a montré l'ambitieux et subtil dialecticien. Si ma tâche pouvait être continuée avec fruit dans un pays comme la France, il me resterait à montrer Edgar Poe poète et Edgar Poe critique littéraire.

The third clause is situated towards the end of the note: 'Pour conclure, je dirai aux Français amis inconnus d'Edgar Poe que je suis fier et heureux d'avoir introduit dans leur mémoire un genre de beauté nouveau'. The other audience-relevant clauses - 'tout vrai amateur de poésie', 'ceux qui savent beaucoup deviner', and 'ces Parisiens légers' - are mentioned in connection to those parts of Poe's work that were not translated, namely criticism and poetry:

Tout vrai amateur de poésie reconnaîtra que le premier de ces devoirs [that is to say, the task to show Edgar Poe as poet] est presque impossible à remplir, et que ma très-humble et très-dévouée faculté de traducteur ne me permet pas de suppléer aux voluptés absentes du rythme et de la rime. A ceux qui savent beaucoup deviner, les fragments de poésie insérés dans les Nouvelles, tels que le *Ver vainqueur* dans *Ligeia*, le *Palais hanté* dans la *Chute de la maison Usher* et le poème si mystérieusement éloquent du *Corbeau*, suffiront pour leur faire entrevoir toutes les merveilles du pur poète.

Quant au second genre de talent, la critique, il est facile de comprendre que ce que je pouvais appeler les *Causeries du Lundi* d'Edgar Poe auraient peu de chance de plaire à ces Parisiens légers, peu soucieux des querelles littéraires qui divisent un peuple jeune encore.

(OEP, p. 1063)

With this fine difference in mind, it can be argued that these nominal clauses constitute the first possible context of identification for French readers; they can give rise to a number of observations regarding the kind and attributes of audience that the translations generate. First, the designated audience seems to be a sub-total of the French reading public. It can be inferred from the text that its first and foremost predicate is that it already sincerely admires Poe's talent and is sympathetic to his work - a predicate the consistency of which testifies that Baudelaire's interlocutor is an audience *a priori* sympathetic to the imported author. The mode of direct address functions as a cunning summoning of a positive to Poe division of the general reading public. Taking heed of these textual moments of conviction it is clear that Baudelaire depicts his project after having taken Poe's appraisal by French readers

for granted. To reverse the point, the discursive mode he employs shows no anticipation of reserved, resisting or hostile response. The translational address can be said to thicken at those instances when the activated presence of observant readers, interested in Baudelaire's translations emerges into acknowledgment. Baudelaire even goes as far as to reverse a common trope in translation projects: instead of speaking about an unknown original author who is to be introduced into the target literature, he refers to the 'Français amis *inconnus d'Edgar Poe*' [*emphasis added*]. What is implied in this subtle reversal is that his translations are a token whereby French readers theretofore unknown to Poe are going to become visible rather than Poe becoming known to them.

The attempt of the narrative is evidently to conjure a kind of reading that will insure a positive, wilful reception. Talking about Poe's thematic and stylistic features, Baudelaire relevantly wrote: 'Dans les livres d'Edgar Poe, le style est serré, concaténé; la mauvaise volonté du lecteur ou sa paresse ne pourront pas passer à travers les mailles de ce réseau tressé par la logique. Toutes les idées, comme des flèches obéissantes, volent au même but' (*OEP*, p. 1025). It seems plausible to argue that Baudelaire, who was taught by Poe to 'reason', set up a careful readership orchestration. The invocation of friends of Poe enhances the connivance between translator and public, an undertone already present in the flattering 'ceux qui savent beaucoup deviner' and abundantly manifest in the intimate tone of the entire notice. It is significant, in this respect, to take note of Baudelaire's unabashed, albeit parenthetical, declaration that his pleasure was to please readers - 'j'eusse pris plaisir, pour leur plaisir'⁹ – a turn of phrase that echoes what Harold Wade Streeter called 'the rule of the rules' of translation discourse in France since the eighteenth-century, i.e. 'plaire à sa nation', and 'ménager les lecteurs'.¹⁰ This in turn, thanks to its pre-emptive potential, further eliminates any notion of scepticism or doubt and formulates in advance the anticipated response. Bearing especially in mind that half of the note is in effect a disclaimer seeking to justify the decision not to translate

⁹ An interesting point here is the combined volume of the 'pleasure' of the translator as he seeks to please his readers indicated in the choice of a noun, 'plaisir' and a verb, 'plaire'. It is possible, however, that raising the ante in this way is only meant to tone down the disclaimer that is to follow, i.e. what Baudelaire failed to translate.

¹⁰ Harold Wade Streeter, *The Eighteenth Century English Novel in French Translation* (New York: Publications of the Institute of French Studies, 1936), pp. 26-27 and 34.

certain, considerable aspects of the original work which are only presented in passing, these scattered allusions to the empathetic French public are crucial parameters of an authenticating strategy.

If the above clauses form Baudelaire's primary idea of readership, the second series should add significant nuances to it. Thus, his readers should be able as 'vrai[s] amateur[s] de poésie' to understand why he could not have translated Poe's poems. Such a feature could indicate a reader of literature as well as a person of letters, and the latter is further corroborated by Baudelaire's letter to Maria Clemm, in which he explicitly states that 'je m'efforçais déjà de faire connaître Edgar Poe aux littérateurs de mon pays' (*OEP*, p. 3).¹¹ The identification of his readers with the literati is, nonetheless, not watertight as it does not quite square with the designation 'vrai amateur de poésie'. And the resistance of the designations to form a unified group continues as the referential leap from the 'sincères appréciateurs des talents d'Edgar Poe' to 'un pays comme la France' further unsettles the initial assumption about Baudelaire's audience being a sub-category of the French reading public. The other qualification of readers accompanies the second aspect of Poe's work that was omitted from the translation – his critical writings: 'il est facile de comprendre que ce que je pouvais appeler les *Causeries du Lundi* d'Edgar Poe auraient peu de chance de plaire à ces Parisiens légers, peu soucieux des querelles littéraires qui divisent un peuple jeune encore' (*OEP*, p. 1063). Here, the compelling presentation of the material omitted is intermingled with a designation of the readers as Parisians whose cosmopolitan outlook encourages a playful dismissal of American actualities. The reasons as to why Poe's critical writings would be unlikely to impress the Parisians connote a mundane assurance that verges on complacency: they do not even need to be stated at all for 'il est facile de [les] comprendre'.

This instance enhances the imbalance between the two national entities invoked and brought to face one another, America and France:¹² as the comparison is fundamentally structured around the French capital, it follows that their respective weight is not equal. Devoid of a centre, America appears to be losing in this frontal

¹¹ The address to Clemm, heading Baudelaire's first translations of Poe's short stories, was published in 1854 - it is therefore prior to the references taken from the 'Avis'.

¹² It should be reminded that the juxtaposed cultures represent the source and the target languages in Baudelaire's project of translation.

cultural encounter with the Parisian capital appearing 'naturally' as what upholds the French hegemonic pretensions.¹³ As a result of this transitory, symbolic arm wrestling, the American literary life is reduced to a rudimentary, backwater entity: notions of vulgarity can be said to lie one step away from this succinct representation, a type of mapping centred on the dichotomy of capital versus province. With one proviso of tangential importance within the increasingly broadening circle of Baudelaire's own impact later on in the century: the opposition of 'ces Parisiens légers' to 'un peuple jeune' could plausibly pass for an analogy as the 'youth' of the American people faces the 'légereté' of the French urbanites. Lexical formulations of this, forgiving, sort can be seen to be feeding the cosmopolitan undertones of the manner in which the translations' readership is being summoned up.

These observations can in turn provide a framework for revisiting the issue of whether the profile of the sketched audience points to a literary milieu or the broader reading public. In this respect, it might be reasonable to argue that the references to the literary men serve the purpose not of defining the assumed audience of his translation, as initially suggested, but rather of flattering the general public by making it privy to aesthetic considerations; that is to say, they function more as an ingratiating mechanism for the general reading public whose elitist aspirations are thus taken into account. In this sense, it is the ambiguity or undecidedness of similar formulations that allows them to be efficient carriers of reader-translator identification. As for the casual clause 'ces Parisiens légers', it surely restricts the audience circumscription by locating literary and reception activities in France to whatever is happening in its administrative capital, Paris. Cross examination of these

¹³ In one of the first American texts by a major literary figure supportive of Poe, James Russell Lowell attributed the structural weaknesses of national letters to the lack of a centre: 'The situation of American literature is anomalous. It has no center, or, if it have, it is like that of the sphere of Hermes. It is divided into many systems, each revolving round its several suns, and often presenting to the rest only the faint glimmer of a milk-and-watery way. Our capital city, unlike London or Paris, is not a great central heart, from which life and vigor radiate to the extremities, but resembles more an isolated umbilicus, stuck down as near as may be to the center of the land, and seeming rather to tell a legend of former usefulness than to serve any present need. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, each has its literature almost more distinct than those of the different dialects of Germany; and the Young Queen of the West has also one of her own, of which some articulate rumor barely

references in the light of the new parameter should re-define the intended audience as the literary and/or reading community based in Paris, ‘the Parisian Anglomaniacs’, as Harold Wade Streeter put it.¹⁴ Together with the statement found in the address to Maria Clemm, that Poe ‘est moins de son pays que cosmopolite’ (*OEP*, p. 3), the literary predominance of Paris renders it a repository of cosmopolitanism.¹⁵ As Harold Rosenberg points out:

Because Paris was the opposite of the national in art, the art of every nation increased through Paris. No folk lost its integrity there; on the contrary, artists of every region renewed by this magnanimous milieu discovered in the depths of themselves what was most alive in the communities from which they had come. [...]. Ideas spreading from this center of Europe and the world could teach a native of St. Louis, T. S. Eliot, how to deplore in European tones the disappearance of a centralized European culture.¹⁶

At this point, Pascale Casanova’s analysis of the unmistakable nineteenth-century hegemony of France and particularly its capital is most relevant.¹⁷ Developing a theme echoing Walter Benjamin’s renowned celebration of Paris as ‘the capital of the nineteenth century’, Casanova sought to examine the French space as ‘une république mondiale des lettres’ within the hierarchical framework of which the majority of nineteenth-century translations aim primarily at what she calls ‘littérarisation’. She defines the concept as ‘toute opération [...] par laquelle un texte venu d’une contrée démunie littérairement parvient à s’imposer comme littéraire auprès des instances légitimes’¹⁸. What is implied in this coinage is that to translate into French is not simply to move into French from another language but, in effect, to acquire literary status – a process that reveals translation to be a kind of literary sanctioning.

has reached us dwellers by the Atlantic’; see I. M. Walker, ed., *Edgar Allan Poe. The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 156-57.

¹⁴ Streeter, *The Eighteenth Century English Novel in French Translation*, p. 161.

¹⁵ See also Peter Wollen, ‘The Cosmopolitan Ideal in the Arts’, in *Travellers’ Tales. Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. by George Robertson and others (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 187-96.

¹⁶ ‘The Fall of Paris’, in *The Tradition of the New* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1962), pp. 209-20 (p. 212).

¹⁷ Casanova, *La république mondiale des lettres*, pp. 188-193

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

Suffice it to point out that the 'Avis' seems in many respects to be aware¹⁹ of the fact that a project of translating a foreign author into French eventually results into ushering him into the French republic of letters. The articulation of this text speaks in fact of nothing but a process of *littérisation*, or literary-making which is very similar to a process of aesthetic consecration. Motifs of ennoblement are integral part of this process, discernible in different textual instances such as, for instance, direct addresses to readers who do not seem to be needing the translations to appreciate Poe's work, allusions to the aristocratic nature of the original author, as well as to some undefined bonding between him and readers who know things by guessing. These indications, playful at times, are suggestive signs of the nobility immanent in the community between translator/Poe/readers: not only the suggested connections are not undermined by lack of transparency and coherence in markers of readership, but they are actually strengthened by such fleeting things as immaterial rapport, guessing, benevolence, lightness, amateurship, and empathy. Because they escape clear designation and resist integration within an all-encompassing definition, their power of effect increases. When Judith Thurman commented upon the out-of-focus portraits of the pioneering Victorian photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron, as 'a hallmark of her style', she pinpointed an important feature of the use of suggestion in portraiture in general: 'Even when she [Cameron] mastered the physics and geometry of taking an impeccable image, she preferred suggestion to definition. Before almost anyone else, she grasped the power of photography to iconify a face, to mythologize a name, to propagate a desire – and that intuition is at the heart of her modernity'.²⁰

Equally important appears another thread. As Baudelaire is self-introduced as the agent of Poe's *littérisation* and interlocutor of the French letters he is espousing some of the authority French letters possess; this could explain the unusual turn 'je suis *autorisé* à le croire [emphasis added]' which closes the 'Avis' by briefly sketching a further editorial follow-up of his translation project from an ever

¹⁹ For instance, of considerable significance is the place of the propositionally empty but intensely connotational, reader-oriented 'tel' in the phrase 'un pays tel que la France' (*OEP*, p. 1063).

²⁰ 'Angels and Instincts. A Julia Margaret Cameron retrospective', in *New Yorker*, 17 & 24 February 2003, pp. 192-200 (p. 200).

privileged standpoint.²¹ On a secondary level of reading, the contracting and expanding motions of the text with relation to its addressees - now the individual admirers of Poe's work, now the whole country - also suggest a notion of the translator as a commanding figure of authority. As Baudelaire's public discourse covers the whole gamut of micro- and macro- reading communities, from the necessarily restricted circle of Poe's friends to Paris to the entirety of France, it clearly demonstrates its imperial grip for the French readers to witness. In the same vein, the last sentence of the 'Avis', juxtaposing the entirety of Poe's work to the fragments that his translations constitute equally indicates the managerial capacity of Baudelaire that also involves prediction of the future as acknowledgment of a 'necessity':

Un temps viendra prochainement, je suis autorisé à le croire, où MM. les éditeurs de l'édition populaire française des *œuvres* d'Edgar Poe sentiront la glorieuse *nécessité* de les produire sous une forme matérielle plus solide, plus digne des bibliothèques d'amateurs, et dans une édition où les *fragments* qui les composent seront classés plus analogiquement et d'une manière définitive.

(OEP, p. 1063; emphasis added)

A minor but significant detail is that the fragmentary aspect of the *œuvre* of Poe is forcibly co-opted in its broad depiction by the translator; in other words, it is not only the translations that go through a process of unification by Baudelaire who accompanied them with a critical biography of Poe, but the original work itself. Such an overbearing attitude, directed towards the original as well as the translations, could not possibly have passed unobserved by the critics on the other side of the Atlantic – T. S. Eliot being one among them who readily picked up the idea of the whole and the part in Poe's re-assessment by the French (see chapter II, Part II).

Further evidence of this overwhelming gesture of the translator is found in a curious noun designating ultimately the vast realm that encompasses Baudelaire's

²¹ However, reading the translator's note as a predominantly self-authorising narrative should not be exaggerated especially given the common, anachronistic tendency of modern readers to take Baudelaire's literary prestige at that time for granted. In fact, and because the thesis depends heavily on the problematisation of the factual nature of Baudelaire's project, the following distinction should at all times be kept in mind: that is to say, the distinction

imagined audience. This is the word ‘*mémoire*’ in a sentence that could sum up his project and reads as follows: ‘Pour conclure, je dirai aux Français amis inconnus d’Edgar Poe que je suis fier et heureux d’avoir introduit dans leur *mémoire* un genre de beauté nouveau’ (*OEP*, p. 1063; emphasis added). With his translational work completed, what he envisages as its ultimate receiver is the memory of the French, a notion that by far surpasses the actuality of the national life which is to receive the annotated translations of Poe’s work. It is the French ‘memory’ then that is being targeted by his translations, it is into ‘memory’ that Baudelaire wishes to introduce his end-product rather than merely the particular nineteenth-century French, or Parisian literary scene, whether nondescript or connoisseur. In the light thrown by this turn of phrase, one could see that the anticipated benefit of the translation was cultural,²² with its rewards being propelled to a horizon hard to delimit because vast and intangible. The idea suggested at this point is that of translation as fabrication of posthumous recognition, championing a notion of the future which is fully invested with aesthetic value.²³ Given that the translator needs to valorise his project within the given constraints of the domestic literary market, such imaginative use of the literary future becomes a kind of strategic extension, a much needed enlargement of his manoeuvrability.

What is more, the condensed way in which memory, an abstract category, is being projected on a concrete audience, i.e. the national reading public, operates a radical change in the morphology of the target audience. The ‘embodied value’ designating translation projects in general takes on here the mien of a seemingly abstracted, idealized notion, namely posterity. To speak of memory is to outline an anonymous, ahistorical agent against the concrete invocation of actual addressees.

between authority as the actual outgrowth of a specific discursive enunciation, and authority as the principle which determines the text’s articulation.

²² The idea of translational benefits was suggested by Anthony Pym who described translators as ‘intermediaries’ who ‘exchange their services for material or social value’; see Anthony Pym, *Negotiating the Frontier*, p. 9. See also Nancy L. Hagedorn, “‘A Friend to Go Between Them’: The Interpreter as Cultural Broker During Anglo-Iroquois Councils, 1740-70”, *Ethnohistory*, 35: 1 (Winter 1988), 60-80 (pp. 60-62).

²³ The trope, to be sure, is not new in translation history. Julia G. Ebel traced the ‘democratising intention’ of Elizabethan translators which went hand in hand with their ‘nationalistic impulses’. She points out that ‘in their insistence that the classics exist on the same “level” as we do,’ they ‘translated, edited and republished “for a general benefit of

We can take a moment to hypothesise that the actual French readers of Baudelaire's day were identified with his imagined audience, viz. the entity 'memory'. According to such a scenario, readers would be encouraged to follow an interlocking series of identification processes with concrete categories – Paris dwellers, amateurs, readers of literature and poetry, citizens of the world – that would eventually lead them to the all-encompassing French memory. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, the mechanism which is at work in similar discursive operations is revealed to be the homogenisation of the reading public and its fashioning into a disembodied entity.

According to this figuration, the target audience imaginatively becomes a repository of the Poe legacy and forms the springboard of Poe's passage into French initially and then European eternity. The public is thereby called upon to take on a long-term cultural role given that it is entrusted by Poe's translator with 'un genre de beauté nouveau'; the task assigned to it involves a cross-breed of concrete and abstract audience activations. Needless to say, the use of memory as a crucial index of the project's aspirations works two ways: the formulation of the audience in terms of memory further boosts Baudelaire's mediating authority. In the course of the narration whereby French readers are being divested of their actual historicity, the translator/aculturator achieves two things: first, he consolidates his mediating role in connection not only with the translated tales but also with the manner in which the target audience is to relate to them and, secondly, he renders the reading public ultimate judge of Poe's posthumous celebration. What is more, this has been precisely the case in a substantial number of contemporary nineteenth-century texts describing or responding to Baudelaire's project; in other words, the note contains the seeds of the translator's subsequent reception by French criticism and letters. The vast ambitions of the project, which was nonetheless presented in terms of an affectionate above all enterprise sprung from the affinity of two poets (acknowledged in both texts I consider), come into focus with the outline of the plan in terms of Poe's 'introduction into French memory'. There is an important additional connotation to this category employed to convey the projected receiving context of the translations: memory in general speech can also connote remembrance of

posterité"; see 'Translation and Elizabethan Nationalism', in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 30: 4 (October-December 1969), 593-602 (pp. 598, 600-601).

something lost, or of a dead person. Keeping in mind the observations made above about the expansion of the readership to include the future reputation of Poe, it is reasonable to assume that there is an analogy between the latter and Baudelaire's chronicle of Poe's life. As we will see in the next chapter, the critical pieces Baudelaire wrote begin with the fact of Poe's death, and elaborate on the meaning of this factual closure for his aesthetical importance, foregrounded and enlarged by his own project.

In the light of the afterlife the Baudelairean project had in Anglophone criticism, it is particularly important to identify and explore those markers that indicate a double or multiple audience²⁴ implied in his meta-texts. Elaborating on the implications of shifts in national and/or ethnic emphasis, Werner Sollors argued that '[E]thnic writers in general confront an actual or imagined double audience, composed of 'insiders' and of readers, listeners, or spectators who are not familiar with the writer's ethnic group'.²⁵ The case of a translational, in the main, project such as Baudelaire's raises similar considerations dealing as it were with the source and the target-language and culture. Given that he provided a number of pronouncements about the two cultural contexts that delineate the overall project, these can account to some extent for his subsequent impact on modern American discourse. The analysis has shown thus far that the critical pieces accompanying Baudelaire's translations have to be rooted in nation-centred culture, namely the French reading market. As such, they slightly contrast with the translated corpus which, having been decontextualised, is likely to appear universal in intelligibility, value and importance. Therefore, the two types of writing, translational and critical, standing at a slight angle towards one another, already give rise to some tension. In this case, however, the tension was somewhat subsided as Baudelaire pushed national-audience markers closer to the otherworldly category of memory. The way in which he bends the translational framework will become even more evident in the following discussion of markers that are in principle heterogeneous in relation to the target audience: these concern the source culture.

²⁴ As Werner Sollors put it, 'the authors change plot lines to suit what they think of as the respective audience'; see *Beyond Ethnicity. Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 250.

²⁵ Sollors, *ibid.*, p. 249.

The general overdetermination that characterises any translation project takes a particular form in Baudelaire's case as he seeks to establish Poe in French as a supreme literary model. Baudelaire's mediation has to take heed of the unlabelled status of Poe's work on both coasts of the Atlantic, being controversial in its native country and simply unknown in France; that is to say, he has to handle carefully those parameters that touch on the constraints of the translation enterprise.²⁶ The constraints concerning the implied dual readership (source- on the one hand, target- on the other) cause a concern with safeguarding his venture, making it imperative that its reception is not endangered by exposure to resistance, indifference or, plainly, oblivion. In this light, textual references to the dual readership of the translation shall be cross-analysed; the findings which were garnered so far on the basis of the 'Avis du traducteur' will be juxtaposed to the anterior letter entitled 'A Maria Clemm' so as to show a different plot line advanced in relation to a different audience, namely the American. The letter addressed to Poe's mother in law and aunt was never sent to her by Baudelaire. As for its editorial fortune, the *Pléiade* editor informs us²⁷ that the 'superb' letter to Maria Clemm was replaced in 1856 by a dedication of the transcribed into French sonnet, 'To my Mother'; the dedication reads as follows: 'Cette traduction est dédiée à Maria Clemm à la mère enthousiaste et dévouée à celle que le poète a écrit ces vers' (*OEP*, p. 1).²⁸ Given the absence of an actual communication between the translator and Clemm, it would be accurate to argue that the address functions more as a statement towards his French audience, a statement which has been cross-fertilised by its cultural charge. With this in mind, I will be arguing that the discursive manipulation of Maria Clemm by Baudelaire represents a culmination of his far-reaching invocations of readership that manages embodied and disembodied motifs by means of dramatisation. After having spread his audience projections widely across the reading horizon, Baudelaire materialises a figure, that of Clemm, which is acting out a negotiation not only of the source- and target-culture dissonance, but also of the localisation and abstraction that lay claim to his project.

²⁶ Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Translation and Transfer', *Poetics Today*, 11: 1 (Spring 1990), 73-78 (p. 77).

²⁷ For a brief philological commentary on the actual production of the letter, see Y. -G. Le Dantec's annotation (*OEP*, p. 1067).

²⁸ The inscription is in capital letters, which should explain the slovenly punctuation of the transcription.

These two latent forces do not cancel each other out according to a binary, mutually exclusive logic; they are rather dislodged, and magnified in the fictional figure of Clemm, thereby acquiring a substantially extended lease of life.

In his address to Maria Clemm, the overall tone is warm and affectionate playing up Baudelaire's psychological affinity with Poe, his empathy with his life and work and explicitly stating his urgent desire to bring Poe's work to the attention of the French literary public. The personal pleasure taken in the realisation of this project is no less marked than in the 'Avis' but this time it is doubled in Clemm's eyes. He first specifies that 'ce n'est pas seulement *le plaisir* de montrer ses beaux ouvrages', and he continues by saying that 'je désirais *réjouir vos yeux* maternels par cette traduction' (*OEP*, p. 3). The instance leads one to assume that this peculiar courting of the woman transpires through a merging of the personal with the public: 'je devais cet hommage public à une mère dont la grandeur et la bonté honorent le Monde des Lettres' (*OEP*, p. 3-4). In this sentence, the figure of a mother is brought to face an institutionalised literature, Casanova's 'republic of letters', in a true ceremonial manner. What is more, the encounter of the woman with the institution does not appear to be trivial, or ill-adjusted, as her subjective trait of 'bonté' is accompanied by 'grandeur', thus showing the mother to be equal in prestige and merit to the literary republic. The tableau Baudelaire paints is grandiloquent as the two actors are pronounced to measure up to one another. Equally important is that the translator is present in this high setting; as a matter of fact, he is the medium of Clemm's sanctification by universal literature and the agent who inversely proclaims the legitimacy of the latter in her person.²⁹ This is how the project of the French translations is being elaborately and dramatically staged in terms of an imaginary American ally of Poe.

The sentimentality of the address is beyond doubt and, in this respect, it is analogous to the 'Avis' that gave subtle evidence of a built-in secret understanding between translator and readers, as illustrated earlier. The waves of warmth circulating between two kindred souls, Baudelaire and his addressee, Clemm, in this

²⁹ Julia Kristeva has stressed, relevantly, that 'a woman never participates as such in the consensual law of politics and society but, like a slave promoted to the rank of master, she gains admission to it only if she becomes man's homologous equal'; 'Why the United

'missive d'une âme à une âme' carried 'à travers les mers qui [les] séparent', could indicate a gesture to summon a response that would be of benefit to an unsolicited project. The difference between the two texts is that the letter to Clemm, in its laudatory summarization of Poe's work,³⁰ introduces the translator as agent of a broad move to familiarise 'le Monde des Letters' with 'un des plus grands poètes de ce siècle'. The indicated geographical space might be Europe for there is an explicit concern that Germany might translate Poe from English first, although it could in theory be expanded to include the whole world. Because Poe 'est moins de son pays que cosmopolite' (*OEP*, p. 3), cosmopolitanism is being reflected back on the translator's project which necessarily addresses a particular, i.e. national, reading public, as we have seen. Thus, it is no wonder that Baudelaire acts symbolically as part of a bigger delegation of literary ambassadors sanctioning Poe's aesthetic merit, while his project acquires hues that by far surpass its national constraints. Unsurprisingly, this is a multi-layered operation eventually leading to a different level where the Francocentric accent seems to be transformed into a primarily universal emphasis. In order to suit reading expectations, which his notes have disclosed as heterogeneous, he has to transcend concentric criticism and become a translator of literariness into a non-exclusive idiom. But because the materials for such an idiom must be drawn from existing typologies of alterity in translation writing, expressed in nation-centred terms, the task should not be straightforward, nor unproblematic.

The tension between the two different types of readership expectations is carefully handled in the paragraph in which Clemm is given the right to act as judge of Baudelaire's project: 'Vous lirez le travail que j'ai composé sur sa vie et ses œuvres; vous me direz si j'ai bien compris son caractère, ses douleurs et la nature toute spéciale de son esprit; si je me suis trompé, vous me corrigerez. Si la passion m'a fait errer, vous me redresserez' (*OEP*, p. 3). The powers given to her have been cautiously formulated in such a way as not to endanger the aesthetic credentials of

States?', in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 272-98 (p. 296).

³⁰ 'Deux ans avant la catastrophe qui brisa horriblement une existence si pleine et si ardente, je m'efforçais déjà de faire connaître Edgar Poe aux littérateurs de mon pays'. Baudelaire also speaks of 'le plaisir de montrer ses beaux ouvrages qui me possède', and of a 'pieux hommage à la mémoire d'un écrivain' (*OEP*, p. 3).

the project, or its self-attributed authority. What she is being asked to perform is to become a character witness for Poe and confirm, as the voiceless addressee of the letter, the ingratiating perception of Poe as a martyr of the American way of life. These powers are completed by the concession of the right to 'reprimand' in a 'delicate', certainly, manner Baudelaire's 'severity' of critique springing from his aversion to America's mercantile democracy: 'De votre part, Madame, tout sera reçu avec respect et reconnaissance, même le *blâme délicat* que peut susciter en vous *la sévérité* que j'ai déployé à l'égard de vos compatriotes, sans doute pour soulager un peu *la haine* qu'inspirent à mon *âme libre* les Républiques marchandes et les Sociétés physiocratiques' (*OEP*, pp. 3-4; emphasis added).

'Une âme libre' rather than any other variety of political belief is what dictates, according to the text, plain hatred in the face of a society like America. It is interesting to see how cunningly Baudelaire's narrative allays instances of national chauvinism representing for the French readers Poe's cultural context by camouflaging them as the offspring of 'une âme libre'. The motivation of a freedom of spirit is on a par with the indirect, covert translation of America as a case of 'les Républiques marchandes et les Sociétés physiocratiques': both follow the logic of a narrative with a sensitive mandate. Agent of a project that seeks the largest possible unanimity, Baudelaire shows a concern with playing down national differences between French and American ascriptions. On the one hand, there are unmistakable traces of face-to-face cultural opposition – as, for example, '*vos compatriotes* [emphasis added]' – that strain the narrative along the lines of a clear national demarcation. On the other hand, Baudelaire draws on undisputed universalistic principles, for example, the predominance of an 'âme libre'; he dilutes the reference to America by designating it as a mere instance of 'les Républiques marchandes et les Sociétés physiocratiques'; and, above all, he designates Maria Clemm, an American, to be the judge and ultimate arbiter of his symbolic diatribe.

Maria Clemm becomes strategic in regulating the different plot lines that the two translator's notes have set up. The way in which the figure of Clemm comes about is significant, first, because it materialises and, thus, foregrounds the source culture in a way that diverges from the 'belles infidèles', the standard translation

trope in his time prescribing a thorough normalisation of all translated literature.³¹ Most importantly, the affectionate, soulful terms in which he addresses Poe's surrogate-mother seem to suggest a singular and compellingly positive manner of imagining the American, source-context. Baudelaire certainly foregoes to 'take his readers by the hand' in order to initiate them to Poe's originary context,³² and chooses instead to configure the latter anew on the basis of this highly charged figure. In this sense, he surpasses the formal necessity of translation projects to appeal predominantly to the domestic public by having incorporated malleable representations of the American source-culture. In the light of the above, it is easy to understand why the figure of Clemm, fictional in function, had to be of such a marked symbolic value. The editorial particulars have already established that Baudelaire contrived Clemm out of the biographical material that was at the time available to him; he first gave shape to a concrete feminine person, as close to the real one as possible, only to idealize and strip her from reality by painting her portrait in eerie, angelic strokes. The key rationale behind this can be grasped fully if we put more pressure on the two plot lines suggested already: whereas the French literary memory which is to receive Poe's posthumous work is self-contained, self-explanatory and disembodied, the American mother figure invoked is, at first at least, highly embodied and localised as a result of its biographical verisimilitude. This is also indicated in the pseudo-dialogue suggested by 'vous me direz si j'ai bien compris son caractère', and the concreteness of the itinerary sketched in the clause 'à travers les mers qui nous séparent'. But at the very moment when we acknowledge the localised significance of these clauses, they instantly become symbolic and render the figure of Clemm who authorises the imagined trip more of a metaphor than a living person with whom the translator converses. The imaginary movement of the translator over the Atlantic ocean to meet Poe's angel-like kin automatically situates his project on a plane quite different from the spatially fixed and static of the

³¹ Jacques G. A. Béreaud, 'La traduction en France à l'époque romantique', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 8 (1971), 224-44 (p. 227).

³² Such 'signposts' of cultural explication are 'footnotes, lengthy asides, explanations which at times seem superfluous or even offensive to some readers, bibliographies, and glossaries'; Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 250. Standard translation terminology speaks of cultural, technical or linguistic information added by translators to their versions depending

Francocentric references; the more engaging the dialogue is, the more imaginary it becomes.

On a symbolic level then, if Poe is being adopted by the French poet, as the prevalent trope in Poe scholarship has it, the filial letter of Baudelaire to Clemm, together with the dedication to her, betrays in turn an inverse appropriation by which Baudelaire is made into an orphan, and thence becomes the son of Maria Clemm. In effect, the subsequent reception of Baudelaire's project seems to have responded to the suggestion of such a triadic family comprising the two brothers, Baudelaire and Poe, who were also linked to one another as sons of Clemm, at Baudelaire's instigation. The perpetuation of similar allegories in critical practice does not mean to prompt a psychoanalytic examination but rather to stress organicity as the sought-after effect of the translator's figuration. George Steiner used the triadic pattern as an example of the 'remarkable economy of motifs' prevailing 'in mythologies, folktales and the telling of stories in literature the world over'; he pointed out that '[t]ales of triadic temptations and choices, as between three roads, three caskets, three sons, three daughters, three possible brides relate Oedipus to King Lear, Lear to Karamazov family and countless variants of this root-structure to the tale of Cinderella'.³³ Once such deep-rooted, organic traits rub off on Baudelaire's project, embodied elements begin to recede and drive the Poe plot onto a different plane. Therefore, Baudelaire's use of the mother-cum-guardian-angel figure as his particular American interlocutor can be construed as a rhetoric device to enhance the universalistic shape of his project, which would subsequently allow him to address not only the French but, by extension, the European and global public too. As shown previously, this is achieved by a two-pace manoeuvring whereby the woman Clemm is vividly concocted only to recede behind the masque of the eternal Mother.

What seems to be the case is that this device is meant to round off Baudelaire's image as a translator who addresses the nation (even in the version of the Parisian microcosm) by enhancing his authoritative persona with the soulfulness, the sympathetic responsiveness of a man publicly expressing his adulation to a

on the requirements of their readership; cf. Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation* (Phoenix ELT, 1995), pp. 91-93.

³³ George Steiner, 'What is Comparative Literature?', *No Passion Spent. Essays 1978-1996* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), pp. 142-59 (pp. 153-54).

mother. With this fictional device, Baudelaire managed to turn the structural restriction of translation duality – involving, as it were, two languages, two cultures, two readerships - to an advantageous packaging. He suggests that his project has an ally within the foreign culture, an ally whose organic form has a direct bearing on the positioning of the project within the French context. In other words, there is an analogy between the readers of the translations and the figure of Clemm. In terms of readership activation, the analogy requires the empathetic French readers to identify with the feminine figure, which is held up as an exemplar of a resisting, to the point of self-sacrifice, subject which also turns out to be an instrument of literary justice. The advantage of an organic discourse grounded on the filial letter to Clemm which establishes brotherhood bonds with Poe, is evident; it testifies to the manipulative power of Baudelaire as he exploits the restricting dichotomy of source- and target-language in order to forge and further his authority, and give his project the breadth it takes to be solidly installed in the receiving community. Assuming that a translational project needs to fill in advance a certain space with ‘content’, then the Clemm dramatisation is Baudelaire’s particular response to that need: it allows him to successfully address an audience which is heterogeneous in principle, to find therein scope and breathing space and become relevant to the domestic community. The two different plot lines sketched above, one taking its cue from concentric authority, the other from amorphous humanity and organicity, act in concert to give a seemingly indivisible shape to his general project, making it eventually a recognisable instance of assertive cultural appropriation.

Having begun this part of the discussion with the effort to identify the audience imagined and engineered by Baudelaire, it is becoming possible now to see how this image, which has come to include a notion as high-reaching as the entire memory of a people, was rhetorically accommodated. His strategic move to materialise for the French public the American source of his translations through the medium of the allegorical figure of Clemm explains more than anything else the all-encompassing breadth of his translational vision. It can be assumed that this move constitutes the necessary symmetrical counterpart of a project whose target audience has been defined as the universalised memory and history of France (‘universalised’ because it is presented as one, not multiple). Contemporary translation theorists

would be inclined to read³⁴ the Baudelairean vision of Frenchness as an instance of a colonising spirit levelling out difference and foreignness. It would, indeed, be hard not to see that the translator's meta-texts provide the voracious French self-perception with a figure easily assimilable, a figure in which cultural differences have been greatly reduced: this is the figure of the mother, presented by Baudelaire as an idealised impersonation of 'goodness'³⁵ (the conclusion of his letter is in English - 'goodness, godness' – something that further promotes the illusion of an actual address to a real person) - a virtue that, if we were to believe his rhetoric, motivates his own translation effort too. Baudelaire, thus, appears here as a 'cultural impersonator' wishing to promote his project by 'tak[ing] on the identity of the Other' and pre-emptying its specificity on the basis, indeed on the very territory, of mono-national authority.³⁶

Shafts of particularism and universalism alternate recurrently as each sub-audience - be it national, sub-national (centre or periphery), or community-based (literary people or readers of literature) - is made to reflect upon each other: glimpses of one another allow for, organise, and regulate self-ascriptions of readers. What is more, the mirroring itself provides the site for mutual metamorphosis. On the one hand, the French readers can identify themselves with the familiar, fictionally 'American' face of the mother and, at the same time, lose their situatedness by identifying themselves with Baudelaire's pompous 'mémoire'; on the other hand, 'Clemm', already rendered an animistic metaphor for an idealised source-culture, loses any embodied traits it might have for the French public as it is becoming the ultimate arbiter of Baudelaire's project, a project requiring her to be, not the woman born Maria Clemm, but an archetypal mother. Crucially, what this shifting game seems to indicate is a need to make the translational project relevant for its *hic et nunc* audience by incorporating forms of embodiment that were considered more appropriate, or less disruptive. It is very likely that the ambitiousness of these

³⁴ For a summary of a type of reading which is sensitive to colonizing appropriations in translation and leery of 'domesticating' approaches, see the introduction to Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 1995).

³⁵ 'Adieu, Madame; parmi les différents saluts et les formules de complementation qui peuvent conclure une missive d'une âme à une âme, je n'en connais qu'une adéquate aux sentiments que m'inspire votre personne: goodness, godness [sic]' (*OEP*, p. 4).

³⁶ Martin and Mohanty, 'Feminist Politics', pp. 207-208.

manoeuvres speaks more of the systemically weak position of the translator, who had to cope with the fragmentation of nineteenth-century translational logistics, rather than any intrinsic authorial intention. There is considerable textual evidence that particularistic markers come second to the prevalent universalism of Baudelaire's project. For, although there is a constant dialogic tension between different forms of ascriptions, his readers are basically presented with ultimate value-projections³⁷ drawing on universalism. Having said that, the overall format of the present study attributes great value to the very process of mirroring; although there is evidence that it is universalism that is prioritised at the expense of particularism, the arch-geometry of Baudelaire's project demands, as such, more critical attention for it is precisely what will invite operations of mirroring on the other side of the Atlantic.

³⁷ Also 'value orientations'; see Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, p. 14.

Chapter 2. The spectral original of Baudelaire

The previous chapter has explored the ways in which Baudelaire has sketched out different types of audiencehood and, in particular, demonstrated their rhetorical configuration as an interplay between universalistic and nation-centred inflections. It was argued that the two different genres of narratives, i.e. the translator's note and the filial letter, advance two different plot lines, one tending towards the concrete and the particular, the other towards the all-encompassing and the universal. The advantage of showing the regulating force of this duality is that it also disrupts a representation of translation as a privileged one-to-one interaction that automatically excludes agents other than the translating and the translated writer.¹ In Baudelaire's invocations of readership, a number of parameters are seen to enter the translation site such as, for instance, the hegemonic pretensions of nineteenth-century France, the urbanisation of the literary institution, as well as ascriptions of national belonging and difference that are played against one another. The manner in which these forces are deployed against an ideational universalism constituted the main site of observation in Chapter 1.

The next step is to consider the project from the standpoint of its original; given that the critical pieces are part of a project which is primarily translational, it is important that the nature of its original be explored. Original here designates in a pragmatic manner both the subject matter of Baudelaire's critical pieces, as well as the original of his translations. The extent to which it also refers to Poe the historical person, which is what these texts also claim, is the test case of the present chapter. The commonsensical use of the term 'original' stems from the fact that the critical and biographical notices that Baudelaire provided were meant to accompany the publication of the translations, thereby making their meta-textual aspect predominant. They satisfy, in this respect, the condition of Anton Popovič for the study of metatexts as texts expressing relations 'which have a modelling character

¹ Mary Louise Pratt, 'Ideology and Speech-Act Theory', *Poetics Today*, 7: 1 (1986), 59-72 (pp. 60-61). See also Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Culture and the Word', tr. and ed. by Dennis J. Schmidt, in *Translation Perspectives*, V: Hermeneutics and the Poetic Motion (Binghamton: State University of New York, 1990), p. 14.

(continuity), i.e., which develop or modify in some way the semiotic, meaning-bearing, side of the original text', as texts 'in which a semiotic moment is present'.² It has already been suggested that Baudelaire's project constitutes an emplotment,³ a holistic story relating the life and the works of Poe. With the notion of the original that Baudelaire construes or, to put it somewhat differently, the private subject around which he meant the whole project to evolve, we move closer to the essence of a project which is, at heart, an act of imagining. Moreover, its success is such as to tempt one to maintain that, as a result, Poe will never be one of these writers of the past who are being discovered periodically, by fits and starts: Baudelaire's re-imagining of him made sure that the reinvention of Poe as the poet of modernity par excellence went side by side with his fixation as a poetic find of all (modern) times.

Chapter 1 reflected on the possible purpose that the introduction of the word 'memory' [of the French people]⁴ served in respect to the translator's projected audience. Linking these observations to the current line of investigation, it can be argued that what memory also implies is an apprehension of forgetfulness during reception which upsets as a matter of course and can thoroughly undermine the posthumous understanding of Poe's work. As the translator becomes the repository of Poe's literary consecration, awareness of forgetfulness as an immanent possibility in serialised literary production, especially translated literature, can very well turn into anxiety. Basically, Baudelaire composes the critical forewords under a threat of failure.⁵ As Susan Bernstein pointed out: '[J]ournalistic readership is troubled by *forgetfulness*, by the difficulty of holding together the many texts it receives spread

² 'Aspects of Metatext', 226-27.

³ Emplotment is a term coined by Hayden White who argued that truth narratives – especially historical narratives – are in effect manipulated fictions which create plots of verisimilitude in order to advance a certain understanding of isolated facts; see 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 1-25 (pp. 9-25); see also 'The Historical Text as Literary Artifact', pp. 81-100; Michel De Certeau, 'The French Novel: History and Literature', in *Heterologies: Discourses on the Other*, tr. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 17-34.

⁴ Baudelaire writes: 'Pour conclure, je dirai aux Français amis inconnus d'Edgar Poe que je suis fier et heureux d'avoir introduit dans leur mémoire un genre de beauté nouveau' (*OEP*, p. 1063).

⁵ Margaret Miner, *Resonant Gaps. Between Baudelaire and Wagner* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), p. 28.

out over time and space. The daily readings of an indeterminate readership – the crowd – do not come together to form certainty or knowledge'.⁶ A whiff of the unsettling reality comes through as Baudelaire repeats Poe's reaction at the proliferation of printed matter: he translates from *Marginalia* (CCXLII), '[l]'énorme multiplication des livres dans toutes les branches de connaissances est l'un des plus grands fléaux de cet âge! car elle est un des plus sérieux obstacles à l'acquisition de toute connaissance positive' (*OEP*, p. 1051). In this respect, it is revealing to see how Baudelaire speculated over his project's possible chances of success in the conditions of the domestic literary market in Second Empire France. Bearing in mind the ingratiating and confident mien of his last piece, 'Avis du traducteur', it is significant to notice that his 1856 piece finishes with a note of foreboding:

Si je trouve encore, comme je l'espère, l'occasion de parler de ce poète, je donnerai l'analyse de ses opinions philosophiques et littéraires, ainsi que généralement des œuvres dont la traduction complète *aurait peu de chances de succès auprès d'un public qui préfère de beaucoup l'amusement et l'émotion à la plus importante vérité philosophique.*

(*OEP*, p. 1047; emphasis added)

The two first notices of Baudelaire were published in journals of the time before they could appear in book form, and the first did so only in the *Œuvres posthumes* of Baudelaire in 1908; as for the 'Avis du traducteur', it was meant to be a preface for a collective volume but the plan fell through (*OEP*, pp. 1136, 1137, and 1143 respectively). It was only the third notice, 'Notes nouvelles sur Edgar Poe', the preface to the *Nouvelles histoires extraordinaires*, that avoided the magazine medium (*OEP*, p. 1140) and capitalised on the success, popular and literary, of the translations and/or their prefaces.⁷ The reading patterns established by nineteenth-

⁶ Susan Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century: Performing Music and Language in Heine, Liszt, and Baudelaire* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998 (pp. 139-40; emphasis added).

⁷ The unsurpassable work of Léon Lemonnier, who documented the French reception of Baudelaire's project speaks of 'un succès de librairie' but the terms Lemonnier uses to substantiate it are ambivalent as to what part was played by the translations and what by the critical articles; the excerpts of the press of the time he quotes indicate, at times emphatically, that it was rather the latter that decided the project's sensational recognition; see *Les traducteurs d'Edgar Poe en France de 1845 à 1875: Charles Baudelaire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1928), pp. 153-56.

century conditions of aesthetic production and dissemination⁸ makes it understandable why Baudelaire had to manipulate the articulation of his project in order to transcend contingency and locality, why he had to aim, as explicitly as he does, for the French memory rather than for any specific constituency.

Having said that, the role of this unsettled ambience should not be overstressed. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that Baudelaire's writings are more liable to having exploited the 'apparent peril'⁹ and the fluidity of the social conditions of publishing than having suffered from it. In effect, this view would insist on a deliberate manipulation of the denaturalised literature, which translation is, with the intention of fostering new aesthetics – something that Baudelaire expressly does by using Poe as an aesthetic model in order to attack the poetic norms of French poetics at the time.¹⁰ Such a use of translation has been advocated in the analysis of literature as a system by polysystem theorists such as, for instance, José Lambert who, while discussing the terms of '[l]'état de crise qui caractérise la littérature du dix-neuvième siècle',¹¹ argues that:

En réalité, les multiples conflits et tensions qui amènent les témoins [viz. various literary agents, writers and critics alike] à se définir et à définir leurs conceptions se présentent rarement en terms abstraits, à l'aide de principes explicites. La prise de conscience résultant des discussions favorise une mise en opposition des *modèles* plutôt que des *norms*. C'est donc à propos d'œuvres, de genres, de styles, d'auteurs particuliers que les conflits se déclenchent. Ces modèles prennent une signification positive ou négative; ils se sont chargés d'une *valeur paradigmatique*, surtout les plus représentatives d'entre eux.¹²

⁸ For a more theoretical approach, see Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, 'Some Conjectures About the Impact of Printing on Western Society and Thought: A Preliminary Report', *Journal of Modern History*, 40: 1 (March 1968), 1-56; Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'apparition du livre* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1958). For a historical approach, see Edward E. Chielens, *The Literary Journal in America to 1900. A Guide to Information Sources* (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1975); A. S. Collins, *The Profession of Letters. A Study of the Relation of Author to Patron Publisher, and Public, 1780-1832* (London: Routledge, 1928).

⁹ Pym, *Negotiating the Frontier*, p. 8.

¹⁰ In all, this is the essence of Valéry's essay 'Situation de Baudelaire'; *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean Hytier (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), pp. 598-613 (pp. 599-607).

¹¹ 'Théorie de la littérature et théorie de la traduction en France (1800-1850)', *Poetics Today*, 2: 4 (1981), 161-70 (p. 162).

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 163; emphasis added.

Further on, Lambert underlines that 'la littérature importée fait partie intégrante de la vie littéraire en France, principalement quand elle finit par servir de modèle'.¹³ Therefore, such an approach should make sense within an intercultural frame of analysis; it would, for instance, explain why Baudelaire, and the French symbolists after him, thought it beneficial to use Poe's work as a model of aesthetic creation whereas, in early twentieth century, Ezra Pound squarely rejected the idea.¹⁴

In this respect, the critical pieces have an invaluable function: they provide the binding matter to the series of translated tales that reach the French public intermittently, in fragments, and whose serialised form does nothing to ensure the homogeneous reception of their original author. By accompanying the translations with a mosaic 'text' representing the man and the work in a look-alike verisimilitude, Baudelaire sought to overcome the restrictions to reception imposed by mass market mechanisms. That is to say, he was compelled to convey his homogeneous imagining of Poe to the French reading public paired with the actual translations in order to ensure that it would perceive not a fragmentary, but a whole Poe. Andreas Wetzel relevantly sums up the connection:

His purpose as a translator was not to present illustrative samples of Poe's talent, but to offer Poe's work as a coherent and powerful totality, in a homogeneous shape that did not exist for the Anglo-Saxon reader. While Poe's tales, in each successive English edition, are still being shuffled and reorganized in function of ever-changing criteria, Baudelaire imposed a rationalized, canonical order on them that has remained, along with the translation itself, definitive.¹⁵

There is a useful analogy to be drawn between the material necessity for a critical accompaniment and a debate that was going on in nineteenth-century Paris

¹³ Ibid., p. 165.

¹⁴ In a letter to Harriet Monroe, starting with the sentence 'Poe is a good enough poet, and after Whitman the best America has produced (probably?). He is a damn bad model and is certainly not to be set up as a model to any one who writes in English', Ezra Pound explains why 'it would be treacherous and dishonest to let them [Poe's poems] pass in a thing set up as a model': 'the only stuff to use as a model is stuff that is without flaws, or stuff in which we see the flaws so clearly that we may avoid them'; according to this outlook, 'an ambition to write as well as Poe is a low one'; D. D. Paige, ed., *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), pp. 50, and 55 respectively.

¹⁵ Andreas Wetzel, 'Poe/Baudelaire: Poetics in Translation', *Cincinnati Romance Review*, 6 (1987), 59-72 (p. 66).

concerning musical programs. Franz Liszt's opinion, expressed in an article on Berlioz, summarises a mentality that seems to underpin Baudelaire's beliefs too: '[A program is] any preface in intelligible language added to purely instrumental music, by means of which the composer aims to preserve his listeners from an arbitrary poetic interpretation and to call their attention in advance to the poetic idea of the whole composition, or to a particular part of it'.¹⁶ Such a type of artistic writing which was rightly qualified by Margaret Miner as 'a preventive measure'¹⁷ with respect to aesthetic response could adequately account for Baudelaire's critical endeavour in the face of a potentially disruptive translational reception.

One way to show the manner of Baudelaire's emplotment is to begin by the notion of the original as a spectre which helps to shape and orient the entire narrative. A wealth of meaningful correspondences comes about once it is made clear that what Baudelaire's processing regards is not a fossilised, encyclopaedic referent that today readers might have in mind; it is rather a spectral original which has fixed 'the scheme of the original production [...] into a frozen formula of some kind'.¹⁸ The analysis, as it will be carried out in the present chapter, will show that Baudelaire configures his original in a variety of ways that can be best summed up along the following axes:

- a) the original is *imagined*, spectral: this is its definite predicate;
- b) its ghostlike quality is set within an *oppositional* scheme contrasting Baudelaire's initial perception and the later, arrived at notion of Poe via biographical input;
- c) the opposition which is grounded on the *private* imagining of the translator is extended to include the mistaken *public* perception of Poe by his native culture;
- d) the two previous types of opposition establish, once again, a narrative that mixes the *local* and the *universal*;
- e) the rendering of the original into French (in the dual sense of translation and annotation) is essentially a project of *catharsis*;

¹⁶ The passage is quoted and translated by Margaret Miner, *Resonant Gaps*, pp. 30-31.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

- f) the original has been *aestheticised* in the process of appropriation: it is basically textual, a fiction.

On two different occasions, Baudelaire introduces his project as the result of his realisation that Poe was not the gentleman of affluence he imagined him to be when he first discovered his work, a young aristocrat who dabbled in literature in the genteel fashion that befits a dandy. First, in his letter to Maria Clemm, he writes:

Et quand aujourd'hui je compare l'idée fausse que je m'étais faite de sa vie avec ce qu'elle fut réellement, - l'Edgar Poe que mon imagination avait créé, - riche, heureux, - un jeune gentleman de génie vaquant quelquefois à la littérature au milieu des milles occupations d'une vie élégante, - avec le vrai Edgar, - le pauvre Eddie, celui que vous avez aimé et secouru, celui que je ferai connaître à la France, - cette ironique antithèse me remplit d'un insurmontable attendrissement. Plusieurs années ont passé, et son fantôme m'a toujours obsédé.

(*OEP*, p. 3)

He suggests the same sort of antithesis in his 'Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et ses ouvrages', when he relates that the real man is the opposite of the Poe that many readers of his work - of whom he himself is one - had imagined after having read his works: 'Beaucoup d'autres [personnes] ont cru que c'était un jeune gentleman riche, écrivant peu, produisant ses bizarres et terribles créations dans les loisirs les plus riants, et ne connaissant la vie littéraire que par de rares et éclatants succès. La réalité fut le contraire'¹⁹ (*OEP*, p. 1003). It is in such prototypically comparative terms that Baudelaire described how his project commenced, first in his intimate letter to Clemm and then in a text addressing directly the translations' readers. This double occurrence testifies to the translator's desire to usher his readers into the intimate, symbolic scene of his encounter with the foreign author. The manner is typical of a personal journal: its tone is confiding and the narrative has an air of authenticity and heartfelt sincerity. The intimation we get is that Baudelaire's decision to translate Poe did not simply come about as, conceivably, a result of a steady accumulation of

¹⁸ Popovič, 'Aspects of Metatext', p. 227.

¹⁹ To be sure, the 'contrary' to this patrician perception of literature – an odd way to describe it, without question – is the first, messy stage of the professionalisation of letters in

knowledge about the latter's life, but rather as a disruption, a powerful blow on his previous imagining of him. It is important to stress this point in relation to the role that the work of Poe played in Baudelaire's decision to translate. Although we can assume that it was the deciding factor, if we judge from the critical notices which accommodate biographical curiosity too, it seems that it does not appear to be the sole motivation: translating Poe's work apparently needs to be accompanied by a relating of his exceptionality. As a result, the move to situate the foreign work within its (putative) domestic context already appears to affect the articulation of Baudelaire's critical writing, even at the primary stage of discovery. A process of singularisation is under way as the subjective focus of the biographical intention becomes apparent. Thus, the biographical information Baudelaire managed to gather had a qualitative effect on his image of Poe, created an urge to speak about the man besides translating his tales; his manner of doing so is significant, as we are about to find out.

Assuming that Baudelaire's actual translations and commentaries regard what has caught, kept and fed his imagination in the course of a primal and largely undefined encounter with Poe's work, we should be ready to accept that readers are faced with an obscure, not at all obvious original.²⁰ Its first negative definition is that it departs from the real Poe given that the idea created by the narrator's imagination was outright branded 'false' in comparison to the biographically accurate one. Neither does it coincide with the tales Baudelaire translated for two reasons: first, because if this were the case, they would have erased the necessity for a biographical-critical facet, proven by the history of the tales' reception to be instrumental;²¹ secondly, even those tales which got translated do not represent the entirety of Poe's work, and in actual matter of fact distort its nature to a considerable extent.²² Even though Baudelaire purports to introduce the entirety of Poe's work

Antebellum America; see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 8 vols (Cambridge University Press, 1996), II: pp. 11-73.

²⁰ Or 'prototext', as is Popovič's term; 'Aspects of Metatext', p. 226.

²¹ Lemonnier, *Les traducteurs d'Edgar Poe en France*, pp. 153-56.

²² Jany Berretti showed the 'parfaite unité dans la démarche de Baudelaire' to be the effect of a manipulative romantic fabrication evident in two important ways: '1) dans le choix des textes traduits: presque uniquement les contes [...] – et, parmi les contes, presque aucun des contes comiques et des pastiches les plus évidents, 2) dans sa traduction: elle tend à faire disparaître les nombreuses citations en langue étrangère [...] et les digressions linguistiques,

into the French letters, he inevitably perpetuates the very state of fragmentation he wished to transcend. To be sure, the captivating factor in this is that his critical introduction makes such an efficient case in favour of an all-encompassing co-optation that it effectively conceals these omissions and refractions.²³ Therefore, the only remaining inference that can reasonably be made is that the original offered for contemplation has to be identical to Baudelaire's private idea of Poe, which was neither arbitrary nor the opposite of the real. In order to convey that persisting idea to his readers, to give it some intelligible form, Baudelaire had to make use of biographical data and accordingly adjust them to fit its nature. The necessary co-operation of the two disparate realms - the real and the privately construed - resulted in a reservoir of material that includes fantasies of aristocracy, affluence, elegance, happiness, and genius as the compact depictions in those passages suggest. Paramount among these constitutive elements is aristocracy,²⁴ a characteristic that seems to indicate a member of the spiritual elite set apart from the crowd:

Aristocrate de nature plus encore que de naissance, le Virginien, l'homme du Sud, le Byron égaré dans un mauvais monde, a toujours gardé son impassibilité philosophique, et, soit qu'il définisse le nez du populace, soit qu'il raille les fabricateurs de religions, soit qu'il bafoue les bibliothèques, il reste ce que fut et ce que sera toujours le vrai poète – une vérité habillée d'une manière bizarre, un paradoxe apparent, qui ne veut pas être coudoyé par la foule, et qui court à l'extrême orient quand le feu d'artifice se tire au couchant.

(OEP, p. 1051)

Poe, 'le Virginien' is defined for Baudelaire chiefly by 'son mépris et son dégoût sur la démocratie' (OEP, p. 1050); to speak about Poe is, for him, to recount a fable of artistic virtue and integrity in commercialised times. It has been argued that the reason why Baudelaire 'did not sense a fraternity with the other great American

à gommer les répétitions de mots qui marquent les jalons d'une composition très contrôlée'; see 'Poe en traduction française', p. 194.

²³ This was solidly established in the work of Claude Richard; see *Configuration critique d'Edgar Allan Poe* (Paris: Minard, 1969), pp. 9-12. See also Berretti, 'Poe en traduction française', pp. 190-91 and 196.

²⁴ Such was also the way in which American literary historians perceived Baudelaire's particular 'visualisation' of Poe – see, for instance, Robert E. Spiller and others, eds., *Literary History of the United States*, 4th edn, 2 vols (New York: MacMillan, 1974), I: p. 321.

artists of the period – Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, or Whitman’ is, simply, that they ‘were basically democrats’.²⁵ When Baudelaire articulates Poe’s singularity in such terms, he plays upon American anxieties over the contents of reality and spirituality in artistic representation. Lionel Trilling has exposed that ‘the political fear of the intellect’ has led to an ‘amalgamation of mind with gentility’.²⁶

If one looks closer at this first episode of the narrator’s encounter with Poe, the constitutive elements of Poe’s mythologisation come into focus. The operation is put into effect by collating two extreme moments of perception: one is formed by a Poe created by Baudelaire’s imagination, the other by a biographically accurate Poe. The oppositional scheme is staged and dramatized with all the necessary accoutrements that should give it texture and authenticity; in a few²⁷ words, Baudelaire paints a comprehensive tableau vivant of a genteel life as well as its exact opposite of a poor existence, soothed by the kindness of Clemm, thereby provoking in the observer – any observer, himself and us too – reflex feelings of tenderness. He also ascribes value judgments to these depictions by referring to the first one as ‘l’idée fausse’, and the second as ‘le vrai Edgar’ with a life as ‘ce qu’elle fut réellement’; it is this second Edgar, ‘le pauvre Eddie’, that he is going to ‘[faire] connaître à la France’. The formulation of the entire period seems to be suggesting the importance of getting the record straight with respect to his initial misconception and indeed, in his 1852 and 1856 notices, Baudelaire goes on to provide these very biographical facts that revealed to him how erroneous his perception was. It seems reasonable then to assume that his project is informed by ‘the discourse of truth and falsehood’, by a wish to disseminate the truth about Poe in true journalistic, not to say sensational, fashion.²⁸ Having said that, Baudelaire nonetheless declares himself, at the moment when he sets out to translate the work, to be finally haunted by Poe’s ‘fantôme’ and not the real man. Despite the apparent stress on the value of truth imposed by the journalistic ethos of his time, despite his actual effort to provide his

²⁵ Louis Harap, ‘The “Pre-established Affinities” of Poe and Baudelaire’, *Praxis*, 1 (1976), 119-28 (p. 120).

²⁶ ‘Reality in America’, in *Literary Opinion in America*, ed. by Morton Dauwen Zabel (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), pp. 404-16 (p. 412).

²⁷ Fit to purpose given that they originate, to a considerable extent, in the thematics and the characters’ typologies of Poe’s tales.

readers with a biography of Poe, the fact remains that it is Poe's 'fantôme' that has been haunting his imagination for years after their first encounter. The use and function of the word is something of a puzzle within a fairly straightforward account in which a first, imaginative perception of the American poet is contrasted with a discovery of his life story only to end up with an image of Poe which is not real but spectrelike. The second of the quotations merely states the antithesis between the two images before proceeding with the biographical account: it is the first one that verbalises the riddle.²⁹

What we can infer from the textual arrangement is that the parallel positions of the two past tenses in the sentence '[p]lusieurs années *ont passé*, et son fantôme m'a toujours *obsédé*' [*emphasis added*] indicate an equality of status for what the verbs describe. As a result, the linear passing of time is vividly confronted with the a-temporal fact of obsession – like two Titans, time and obsession stand in defiance but also in dependence of one another. Literary discovery which has its moment of inception as well as a natural development in time is made to face a sentiment that resists historicity in the form of an obsessive idea. Concurrently, the inception of the obsessive moment depends on historical time to mark the particular spot cutting the narrator's time in two, the before and after of his obsession.³⁰ The nominal 'fantôme' unsettles by its presence the trajectory sketched between the before and after; given that the trajectory remains intact for Baudelaire to retrieve, it is preferable to say that its linearity is erased. Its face value becomes questionable in the sense that the march ahead comes full circle to reinstall the supremacy of the first, creative idea (which is also mistaken in relation to the biographically accurate one); any promises of

²⁸ It should be pointed out that the letter was first published in the journal *Pays*, on the 25th of June 1854 (*OEP*, p. 1067).

²⁹ Cf. 'et quand aujourd'hui je compare l'idée fausse que je m'étais faite de sa vie avec ce qu'elle fut réellement, - l'Edgar Poe que mon imagination avait créé, - riche, heureux, - un jeune gentleman de génie vaquant quelquefois à la littérature au milieu des milles occupations d'une vie élégante, - avec le vrai Edgar, - le pauvre Eddie, celui que vous avez aimé et secouru, celui que je ferai connaître à la France, - cette ironique antithèse me remplit d'un insurmontable attendrissement. Plusieurs années ont passé, et son fantôme m'a toujours obsédé' (*OEP*, p. 3).

³⁰ For an intriguing analysis in Lacanian terms of this opening up of the anecdotal, the singular in 'the totalising whole of history', see Joel Fineman, 'The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction', in *The New Historicism*, ed. by H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 61ff.

progress that the itinerary has engendered in readers, or anticipation that something theretofore unknown is soon to be gained are, thus, shed.

The narrative might make allowances for historicity but the fact of obsession is recorded as defying rules of narrative deployment and explicitation – that is to say, it remains enigmatic.³¹ As far as the language of objective truth is concerned, Baudelaire acknowledges it only to reinstall the precedence of a haunting imagination with roots that go deeper for the reason that it appears to fall outside time. The ingenious narrative suggests that the imagined is in effect some form of reality, a persisting one that proves to be invaluable for any kind of perception.³² In the end, what matters in this instance is that its design partly conceals the supremacy of a non-logical, non-inferential imagining over imperatives of historical accuracy dictated not only by journalistic injunctions, but also by the referentiality that determines, as a rule, the way in which the reading public relates to a foreign work. The manoeuvring between in-time and out-of-time movements, between the historical and what surpasses the historical³³ establishes a seeming continuity that is quite reminiscent of Baudelaire's invocations of multiple readership as were demonstrated in Chapter 1; his emplotment seems to be patterned on oppositional elements which have a tendency to interconnect in a way that belies their sharpness.

The next is to ask how does Baudelaire's private figuration of Poe benefit his project as a whole. Given that to most intents and purposes it came into being as the result of an obsessive idea, as the narrative organisation undoubtedly suggests, it is reasonable to reflect on the significance of the opposition staged between the truthful

³¹ This suggests a type of transcendence which asserts the resistance of the work of art in the face of the positivity of descriptive language. It also demonstrates, in absentia as it were, the power of the 'lacuna' in the original work that seems to sum up Baudelaire's idea about translation in general; cf. Peter Dayan, 'De la traduction en musique chez Baudelaire', *Romance Studies*, 18: 2 (December 2000), 145-55. In the first paragraphs of his 'Richard Wagner et Tannhauser à Paris' Baudelaire writes: 'Dans la musique, comme dans la peinture et même dans la parole écrite, qui est cependant le plus positif des arts, il y a toujours une lacune complétée par l'imagination de l'auditeur'; see *L'art romantique* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), pp. 207-65 (p. 211).

³² The far-reaching power of this type of private imagining is manifest in the terms in which William Carlos Williams and T. S. Eliot responded, in the early nineteen twenties and thirties, to the French intimation of Poe (see chapters 1 and 2 of part II).

³³ Susan Bernstein has identified a similar bridging between the historical and the poetic when she discusses Paul Valéry's essay 'Situation de Baudelaire': she argues, in particular that Valéry 'posits a continuity between the historical experience of a particular subject and its transposition into poetry'; *Virtuosities of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 135.

in terms of biography and the truthful in terms of personal perception. For even if it is the 'ghostly' Poe that finally becomes Baudelaire's original, there is still room for the biographical facet which needs to be accounted in compliance with the acculturator's overall plans: the spectral link³⁴ is not unequivocal for it clearly passes through a gesture towards factual knowledge, which, after being taken into account by Baudelaire appears to have acted as some sort of a catalyst. In short, what this oscillation achieves is strategic: first, it gives verisimilitude to the story Baudelaire relates, secondly, it renders the obsessive instance positive³⁵ and thirdly, it garners sympathy for the project. All three functions are important elements of emplotment and can account in conjunction for the solid relation that Baudelaire has established between the figure of Poe and its particular, iconic predicates.³⁶

We have already had an intimate look at how Poe's originary context was depicted (in a true novelistic manner), and also how this was subsequently undone by the notion of the 'fantôme' which establishes the positivity of the translator's original. The third function needs nonetheless further probing. In Baudelaire's own words, the 'ironic antithesis' between the real and the imaginary life of Poe fills him with 'un insurmontable attendrissement'. A language of sympathy is infused into the critical narrative which thus becomes a vehicle of rehabilitation. The fact that, in real life, 'il fallait qu'il [Poe] arrachât son pain' (*OEP*, p. 1016), that 'le malheureux écrivait pour les journaux, compilait et traduisait pour les libraires, faisait de brillants articles et des contes pour les revues' (*OEP*, p. 1008), acquires at a stroke a heightened and urgent meaning when it is juxtaposed to his ideational depiction as the 'pure' and 'noble poet' imagined by some French readers and Baudelaire. Given the primacy of the nobility of Poe, the effect is one of reversal. That is to say, the

³⁴ On the narrative level, the phantomlike quality serves also Poe's perception by Baudelaire as a literary model, characterised by an 'infatigable ardeur vers l'idéal' (*OEP*, p. 1026), 'cet immortel instinct du beau', and 'l'aspiration [...] vers le beauté' (*OEP*, p. 160); Poe is consistently presented as one of these 'âmes amoureuses du feu éternel' (*OEP*, p. 1053), 'un poète' 'qui sait [...] saisir l'intangible' (*OEP*, p. 1058).

³⁵ In the course of his discussion about discursive heterogeneity and homogeneity, Georges Bataille specifies that 'heterogeneous existence can be presented as something other, as *incommensurate*, by changing these words with the *positive* value they have in affective experience; *Visions of Excess. Selected Writings 1927-1939*, tr. by Allan Stoekl, with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr. (Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 143.

³⁶ It goes without saying that the 'patrician' view is deeply rooted in Poe's own work: it is, for example, a major feature of Poe's narrators.

translator does not really depict his original by recourse to biographical data; it is rather that the biographical data are illuminated by juxtaposition to the translator's initial, haunting imagining. In other words, the value-orientations of the narrative have been reset; the signification of reality comes predominantly from the imaginary realm, which not only dictates how raw information is to be decoded but, in the final analysis, authorises and legitimises any such operation. This ingeniously achieved freedom from the necessity of biographical constraints could, on its own, ground the 'voluntaristic' attribute that Margaret Gilman gave to Baudelaire's figuration of Poe.³⁷

It becomes now easier to see how the narrative shapes the incoming information about Poe and its ultimate meaning by structuring the space wherein readers can invest and purge random sentiments and ideas with, so it seems, no patronising: they are induced to follow the same path Baudelaire took and share his 'insurmountable attendrissement' towards Poe. This is where Baudelaire's private imagining is extended to the public realm. As intimated above, the enabling moment of Baudelaire's project is his awareness of a supposedly pre-existing system which has corrupted the significance of Poe's work, and is therefore liable to restorative action: this is Poe's native context that emerges virtually at the same time when Baudelaire fixes his discovery of Poe. The instances where the theme of his cultural alienation³⁸ is developed in the notices are numerous – the following are indicative only: 'Poe, éblouissant par son esprit son pays jeune et informe, choquant par ses mœurs des homes qui se croyaient ses égaux, devenait fatalement l'un des plus malheureux écrivains' (*OEP*, p. 1016). And also, '[d]u sein d'un monde goulu, affamé de matérialités, Poe s'est élancé dans les rêves. Étouffé qu'il était par

³⁷ Margaret Gilman, *Baudelaire the Critic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), p. 89.

³⁸ In an important contribution, Donald Pease examined the theme of Poe's cultural alienation as engineered by Poe's own poetics: 'Unlike that of the other canonical figures subsisting within the "Renaissance" tradition [...], Poe's work always threatens to be exhausted upon a single reading. Acting less like a cultural resource and more like cultural debris, Poe's work sometimes threatens to communicate its inherent tendency toward cultural obsolescence [...]; and, further down, "[e]verything about Poe [...] insists on a recognition of cultural disconnection, threatening the feasibility of the notion of cultural transmission [...]. A literary figure disaffiliated from both a cultural past and a future, whose writing insists on its availability to immediate consumption'; 'Edgar A. Poe: The Lost Soul

l'atmosphère américaine, il a écrit en tête d'*Eureka*. 'J'offre ce livre à ceux qui ont mis leur foi dans les rêves comme dans les seules réalités!' Il fut donc une admirable protestation; il la fut et il la fit à sa manière, *in his own way*' (*OEP*, p. 1050). The theme is summed up in the declaration of Poe's 'excentrique et fulgurante destinée littéraire' (*OEP*, p. 1008). To a large extent, the biographical discourse is used as evidence of the fact that Poe's aesthetic importance was eclipsed in his own country; against such a seemingly factual screen Baudelaire can raise his own, emblematic, challenging perception. Because the distortion is rendered visible in the course of the juxtaposition, the narrator can confidently hold up his project as the supreme instrument of a belated recognition.

It goes without saying that this act requires a receiving community which is in this case the French public. The cultural injustice allegedly suffered by Poe was particular, historical and local, and its remedy occurs posthumously, that is to say outside Poe's time and place. It follows that the posteriority of the translations is an inescapable, factual reality;³⁹ however, Baudelaire's plot structure manages to turn it into something of a categorical requirement for his purposes. The plan of aesthetic rehabilitation not only occurs after the perceived injustice – as the diachrony laws command – but, strange to say, is caused by it. This also implies a need to rehabilitate Poe on a higher ground extending beyond the actual conditions of the translations' production. Although this inference remains unvoiced, it is clear that the claim requires the activation of an agent of recognition situated, like a just referee, outside Poe's chronotopos, as well as outside any specified locality: this is how the notion of the French people's 'memory' comes to be articulated and gain precedence in the translator's note. Only by exceeding the topical constraints inherent in the

of America's Tradition' in *Visionary Compacts: American Renaissance Writings in Cultural Context* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp. 158-202 (pp. 164-65).

³⁹ According to Anton Popovič, '[t]he relation of prototext and metatext has an inevitable *temporal* aspect. One important factor is the time interval between the rise of a work and its primary communication on the one hand, and its metacommunication, i.e., the rise of its metatexts, on the other hand. [...] Since continuity is essentially a diachronic phenomenon, we cannot ignore the temporal aspect in the study of metatexts. [...] [the temporal aspect] deals with the question of communication differences between the receiver of the prototext and the receiver of the metatext, or with the possible loss of the connection between the two in the course of communicating the works [...]. It is also concerned with the stylistic interpretation (rendering, expression) of the time difference between original and

writing activity he is engaging in can Baudelaire put through his appropriation of Poe in the name of universalism.⁴⁰ It becomes now evident that the curious turn of phrase, which was discussed in detail in Chapter 1, is a crucial parameter in Baudelaire's elaborate critical practice: the French memory serves, in effect, to correct the errors of historicity. The notion gives the narrative an elasticity that allows it to transcend, in the long run, its immediate receiving horizon, the French reading public, and to fertilise other, remote receiving contexts.

The symbolic coupling that the narrative performs - Baudelaire reflecting on the public perception of Poe by the American community and wishing to set it right - signals an operation of objectification, one of criticism's quintessential operations. Assuming that Baudelaire's project is met with success and his contemplation of the public disregard of Poe provokes the sympathy of the French republic of letters, the figure of Poe will acquire in its foster country a significance that should exceed, as well as consummate, the privacy of Baudelaire's imagination. It appears then that Poe's canonisation is what the project aims for once it debunks his previous marginalisation. Without fail, it has been hard for reception criticism to circumvent the pervasive theme of rehabilitation which reverberated in most critical works, exposed to the evangelical overtones of Baudelaire's figuration of Poe. Overwhelmingly, any discussion of Poe through Baudelaire seems to have provoked a poignant sense of injustice committed in his originary context; the affectionate trappings of the project constitute, therefore, a strategic parameter, a condition of its enduring energy. The terms of Poe's romanticised story have been so compelling that for a long time they were better than facts for comparatists.⁴¹ In the words of Andreas Wetzl, 'it was precisely *because* Poe was misunderstood in America that

translation'; see 'Aspects of Metatext', pp. 232-33). Evidently, it is the last function, 'the stylistic interpretation of the time difference', that motivates Baudelaire's essays.

⁴⁰ This is not an uncommon outlook. As Michael Warner argued about the 'dialectic of embodiment and negativity, '[p]ublic discourse from the beginning offered a utopian self-abstraction, but in ways that left a residue of unrecuperated particularity, both for its privileged subjects and for those it minoritized'; 'The Mass Public and the Mass Subject', p. 384.

⁴¹ The fallacies that have determined the long history of this comparative case study were identified by a number of scholars; among them, the most captivating accounts were given by P. Mansell Jones ('Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarmé', pp. 38-58) and Floyd Stovall, *Edgar Poe the Poet. Essays New and Old on the Man and his Work* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1969), pp. 181-83.

he deserved to be cherished in France. To read Poe in French is to free him from the fetters of zoocratic⁴² repression and incomprehension, it is to restore him to his 'true' nature'.⁴³ Such feelings of justice regained were propounded by Baudelaire who, as the first initiator, has an unquestionable audacity: he promotes Poe as a literary model by translating his work *and* his idea of Poe. In his letter to Maria Clemm, he gives her his assurances that the author he is 'going to make known to France' is 'le vrai Edgar – le pauvre Eddie, celui que vous aimé et secouru'; the tone of the pledge is unmistakably emotional and comes about as the symmetrical composition reaches a climax. The variational repetition of Poe's first name (the diminutive being a copy of the woman's term of endearment) prepares a second, upward movement: the motherly love and assistance of Clemm during Poe's lifetime collapse in the brotherly love expressed, albeit posthumously, by the project of the French translator. Both agents (of justice) share the affectionate recognition of Poe's worth and are depicted accordingly as his unrelenting allies. In a letter that constitutes an act of unilateral recognition,⁴⁴ Baudelaire, the surrogate brother, identifies in the Poe that Clemm, the surrogate mother, loved and supported the same person he wishes to glorify.

Therefore, the project is articulated and proceeds by assuming a mien of familial altruism and solidarity. These affectionate enunciative terms coupled with the sincerity⁴⁵ of Baudelaire's recounting produce a messianic reading response. Valéry, to name one of Baudelaire's influential readers, assesses his project in the following terms: 'Baudelaire procure à la pensée de Poe une étendue infinie. Il la

⁴² Reference to Baudelaire's qualification of America as 'une tyrannie nouvelle, la tyrannie des bêtes, ou zoocratie, qui par son insensibilité féroce ressemble à l'idole de Jaggernaut' (*OEP*, p. 1031).

⁴³ Wetzel, 'Poe/Baudelaire', p. 69.

⁴⁴ The pietistic act of recognition can be read in the light of a paradigm of translational metaphors as oedipal responses. Serge Gavronsky who proposed the approach with a sharp feminine focus illustrated his description by explicitly referring to 'the Baudelaire-Poe brotherhood'; 'The Translator: From Piety to Cannibalism', in *Sub-stance*, 16-17 (1977), 53-62 (pp. 54-57); cf. Lori Chamberlain, 'Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation', *Signs*, 13 (1988), 464-82 (p. 471).

⁴⁵ It is relevant to see how Baudelaire situates his narrative function in 'Richard Wagner et "Tannhäuser" à Paris': he writes 'qu'il me soit permis, dans cette appréciation, de parler souvent en mon nom personnel. Ce *Je* [...] implique cependant une grande modestie; il enferme l'écrivain dans les limites les plus strictes de la *sincérité*'; *L'art romantique*, p. 207; latter emphasis added.

propose à l'avenir. Cette étendue qui change le poète en lui-même, dans le grand vers de Mallarmé, c'est l'acte, c'est la traduction, ce sont les préfaces de Baudelaire qui l'ouvrent et qui l'assurent à l'ombre du misérable Poe'.⁴⁶ These terms of affection are so solidly embedded in the rhetorical composition that it would be hard to conceive of their impact as something other than an effortless sense of catharsis in the face of a (cleverly staged) scene of injustice. This cannot possibly be overstressed. In 'Sa vie et ses ouvrages', Baudelaire's appraisal reaches a religious climax when he ascribes to Poe qualities of a martyr: 'Je dirais volontiers de lui et d'une classe particulière d'hommes, ce que le catéchisme dit de notre Dieu: "Il a beaucoup souffert pour nous"' (*OEP*, p. 1029). Once again, implicit cultural juxtaposition is integral to this celebratory attempt: the man to whom the virtues of a martyr were attributed is 'Edgar Poe, ivrogne, pauvre, persécuté, paria' (*OEP*, p. 1029). If the physical terrain of Baudelaire's project is the nineteenth-century French fantasia of America as a mercantile society, its human terrain is a soulful tangle of fatality and doomed sublimity. Immediately afterwards, there follows a sort of tombstone epigraph:

On pourrait écrire sur son tombeau: 'Vous tous qui avez ardemment cherché à découvrir les lois de votre être, qui avez aspiré à l'infini, et dont les sentiments refoulés ont dû chercher un affreux soulagement dans le vin de la débauche, priez pour lui. Maintenant son être corporel purifié nage au milieu des êtres dont il entrevoyait l'existence, priez pour lui qui voit et qui sait, il intercédera pour vous.

(*OEP*, p. 1029)

Although the passage was omitted from the definitive version of the notice, it is still illuminative to see to what lengths the translator meant to go to introduce the American author. To endow him with powers of intercession⁴⁷ - cf. the very last phrase of the passage, 'il intercédera pour vous' - is to beatify him. In such redeeming, saintly colours, Poe is brought even closer to the figure of Maria Clemm,

⁴⁶ Valéry, 'Situation de Baudelaire', p. 607.

⁴⁷ Baudelaire writes in his 'Fusées': 'Je me jure à moi-même de prendre désormais les règles suivantes pour règles éternelles de ma vie: faire tous les soirs ma prière à Dieu, réservoir de toute force et de toute justice, à mon père, à Mariette [la servante au grand cœur - as the Pleiade annotation informs us; *OEP*, p. 1137] et à Poe, comme intercesseurs; les prier de me

and is made to sit on a higher ground - one of the main props of Baudelaire's project of rehabilitation.

This is indeed a project of catharsis long overdue, a project which having begun from a mistaken perception, goes on to correct it, and thus establishes for itself a compelling *raison d'être*. Organicity might, conceivably, increase the chances of a translational project against the fragmentation that lies in mass consumption of imported literature, thence it is understandable that Baudelaire wanted to provide an organic, living idea of Poe. The French translational tradition as it developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries insisted on domesticating works of foreign literature to suit the classical or romantic taste of the reading public.⁴⁸ But organic (re-)appropriation, especially the strain that Baudelaire had in mind, could best be carried out on the basis of loss, usurpation, gap or distortion, some dramatic deficit in ideality that demands to be redressed. All that the poet/translator needs to do is respond to the perceived injustice. Such a reductive representation can explain why the spectral notion of Poe had to be grounded on a comparative structure that involves both the subjective and the cultural contexts – the question which was posed at the beginning of the present chapter. Andreas Wetzel illustrates this when he emphasises that 'the unfavourable reception of the American public became itself an important factor in the universal acclaim that Poe achieved in France. Baudelaire presented Poe as a forlorn and proud aristocrat, devoted to his artistic integrity wandering unrecognised through a hostile America'.⁴⁹ The 'persecution' of Poe by his native society, vocally stated by Baudelaire in his biographical account, is sealed with the news of his death;⁵⁰ the fact that the biographical tale begins with the

communiquer *la force nécessaire* pour accomplir tous mes devoirs'; see *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 1: p. 673.

⁴⁸ Béreaud, 'La traduction en France à l'époque romantique', p. 227; Streeter, *The Eighteenth Century English Novel in French Translation*, p. 23; Michel Brix, *Le Romantisme français. Esthétique platonicienne et modernité littéraire* (Louvain-Namur: Éditions Peeters/Société des études classiques, 1999), pp. 52-53, and 158-59. See also José Lambert, 'L'époque romantique en France: Les genres, la traduction et l'évolution littéraire', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 2 (avril-juin 1989), 165-70; Lieven D'hulst, 'Le discours sur la traduction en France (1800-1850)', in *Revue de littérature comparée*, 63: 2 (Avril-Juin 1989), 179-87.

⁴⁹ 'Poe/Baudelaire', pp. 68-69.

⁵⁰ On a semiotic plane, it is interesting to take note of the title of Griswold's edition of Poe's work that Baudelaire used, namely *The Works of The Late Edgar Allan Poe*; Rufus W. Griswold, ed., *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, 4 vols (New York: Redfield, 1850-

factuality of Poe's death illustrates that the loss mentioned above is a motor of organicity.

It is within this frame that another reversal takes place, one announced early on by the image of Poe haunting Baudelaire's imagination. According to this, the theatre of restoration is not the historical Poe anymore, but the image of him in the mind of Baudelaire who, consequently, becomes an agent of justice. When Andreas Wetzel refers to Baudelaire's project, he speaks of a project of transforming Poe and his work 'into a *French* literary phenomenon of which he – Baudelaire – was the exclusive author'.⁵¹ The same trajectory that previously led us from the initial, imagined Poe to the real, poor Edgar, now leads us back, in a rather oblique way, to Baudelaire's 'false' idea of Poe, the ghostly, haunting image of the aristocrat of the spirit. By this shift of representation Baudelaire becomes the true original for Francophone readers – an idea which is not entirely new in Baudelaire scholarship. In her discussion of Baudelaire's 'Richard Wagner et "Tannhäuser" à Paris"', Margaret Miner convincingly argues in favour of a dual perception of the translation metaphor as it is used by him. She points out that the notion of translation serves as a general metaphor for the movement of both composers and listeners between a piece of music and its original';⁵² she then goes on to clarify: 'Every composer must translate a piece into music following the program established by its mysterious and inaccessible original, and every listener must then translate the music into an imaginative program leading back to the original'.⁵³ The division between the two different, but interconnected, processes of translation becomes evident as Baudelaire invites his readers to follow a path that retraces his own steps, a path leading to his own obscure source, the spectral Poe.

Along the same lines, Michele Hannoosh discusses Baudelaire's understanding of painting as translation and the possibility of aesthetic judgment. To the question 'can we perceive how well the translation renders the original, if we do not have access to the original', Baudelaire would answer that the power of the artistic image to 'recall' the original can 'lead the viewer to have an experience

1856). The factuality of Poe's death is occasion for defamation of character by Griswold, and sublimation by Baudelaire.

⁵¹ 'Poe/Baudelaire', p. 63

⁵² *Resonant Gaps*, p. 48.

analogous to the painter's'.⁵⁴ In this respect, the holistic image of Poe proposed simultaneously with the translated fragments of Poe's stories indicate a road towards the original, unattainable source. To reverse the point, the readers of the fragmentary translations are unified within the indulgent category of the French 'memory' and regain the source of the translated work through Baudelaire. Baudelaire aimed high when he tuned his voice to the atemporal heights of a people's overarching memory;⁵⁵ he raised the ante and manipulated the referential terms of his translator's note so as to enhance his authorial appeal. These are concrete instances where Baudelaire the translator can be seen as both the apex and the transgressor of the translations' innermost logic: to the extent that Poe was made to emerge out of American context and be embraced by the French in terms of a singular literary model, he became inextricably fused with its agent, Baudelaire. Susan Bernstein, in her discussion of Baudelaire's citational practices, points out that:

Baudelaire incorporates Liszt's text and appropriates it to the degree that Liszt serves as a mouthpiece for what Baudelaire himself would, but cannot say: my translation translates the original in such a way that for you, reader, it is *the condition of possibility of your experience of the original*; my translation partakes in and is part of the original; *I am the origin*.⁵⁶

The necessity according to which the figure of Poe becomes linked to his translator's stems from Baudelaire's general aesthetics. In her important account, Michele Hannoosh stresses that for Baudelaire 'a painting translates precisely the artist's interpretation of nature, the image of nature in his mind'; also that, 'the imaginative painting is one which conveys the thoughts and feelings that the artist has in contact with nature. It is precisely this personal image of nature that constitutes his conception'; further down she adds that 'the artist must understand the original and form an image of it in his own mind, which he then translates into a

⁵³ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁴ Michele Hannoosh, 'Painting as Translation in Baudelaire's Art Criticism', in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 22: 1 (January 1986), 22-331, p. 29.

⁵⁵ The importance of 'memory' in Baudelaire's perception of translation – although in connection to painting – has also been underlined by Michele Hannoosh who has identified certain points of contact between the artist's imagination in contemplation of nature and the notion of the original; *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁶ *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 143; emphasis added.

more generally intelligible language'.⁵⁷ According to this vision which expresses translation in terms of the artist's imagining, the object of representation is not so much an object of the outside world but, rather, a sign whose elements are recombined and ordered into an arrangement that is intelligible to the observer. These observations further corroborate the definition of Baudelaire's original as a creative translation, a rewriting. Moving from painting and music into translational writing proper, the particularly slippery territory of critical writings shows how literal this aesthetic notion becomes: the subject matter of his criticism and translation is Poe the aesthetic construct, a spectre hard to define.

The fictional shape of the critical texts (Hayden White's 'emplotment devices') becomes visible as soon as the system of reference that fixes Poe's idea is set, complete with an obsessive particle - element of disturbance in the oppositional system. What is more, this notion activates the ultimate *aestheticisation* of Poe, a point that is going to be developed in the next chapter. His ghostlike quality, as it was insinuated by Baudelaire, implies a creative configuration that the analysis will further corroborate by showing that Poe's reinvention is grounded on a process of dramatic manipulation. It is hard to overemphasize that the textuality of Baudelaire's creative perception of Poe is the agent of fermentation that renders this literary encounter so compelling and so unnerving in its effects: the enigmatic nature⁵⁸ of his discourse enhances greatly its efficacy and magnetism as a piece of cognitive demonstration. It has the power to transcend the biographical, referential, thematic or other idioms of literary understanding at the very moment when it calls them into being; it is no coincidence that its reception was that of a creative misprision.

⁵⁷ Hannoosh, 'Painting as Translation in Baudelaire's Art Criticism', pp. 23, 26 and 28.

⁵⁸ In his discussion about the 'wordliness' of the critic/interpreter of the work of art, Edward Said writes that, 'a text has a specific situation, a situation that places restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as a mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of more or less surface particularity as the textual object itself'; 'The Text, the World, the Critic', p. 171. The point, touching on the creation of 'mystery' as an outcome of critical activity, will be revisited in the course of the chapter dealing with William Carlos Williams's approach to the French rendering of Poe.

Chapter 3. Papery Poe

The previous chapter has established the ghostlike quality of Baudelaire's original, the imaginative manner in which he shapes, in his critical texts, the representation of Poe he proposes to the French public alongside the translations. To do that, Baudelaire construes a multi-layered system of overlapping dualities opposing, first, his initial and subsequent ideas of Poe and, then, the domestic (American) and foster (French) perceptions of him. Within this system he places his obsessive, spectral idea of the original which becomes, as a result, the object of a move of reinstatement. The entire enterprise acquires hues befitting a pietistic effort of redemption dictated by a creative imagination who seeks to appropriate. In rapport with Baudelaire's overall ideas about translation, this effort makes the critical essays a necessary preventive means against the spectre of misinterpretation that threatens the translated tales; for under the mass of printed matter in nineteenth-century booming publishing industry, the fragmentary consumption of imported literature by the reading public could lead to sure oblivion. In this light, the actual idea of translation as practised by Baudelaire calls for a critical assortment which, from a different path, should join his higher notion of targeted audience, that of the 'French memory'.

This chapter, which completes the mapping of the project that Poe became for Baudelaire, shall explore the textuality that summarises, more than anything else, Baudelaire's special contribution to (inter-cultural) literary criticism. There is a mimetic perception of textuality which affords too restricted a view as it takes the work under study as a mirror of the author's character and poetics. Baudelaire considers this approach a joyful occasion: 'C'est un plaisir très grand et très-utile que de comparer les traits d'un grand homme avec ses œuvres' (*OEP*, p. 1014); at another instance, presenting 'William Wilson', he throws to his readers a rhetorical question, '[q]ue dites-vous de ce morceau? Le caractère de ce singulier homme ne se révèle-t-il déjà un peu?' (*OEP*, p. 1007). This is not the approach adopted. Chapter 3 will explore Baudelaire's particular brand of biographical writing by showing textuality as the predominant organising principle of his narrative. The Baudelairean Poe is, in Philippe Hamon's words, 'a textual effect', or 'l'effet-personnage du

texte'.¹ In the course of analysis, the usual biographical epistemology seeking to deduct the reality of the man from the textual materiality, namely an anthropomorphism of sorts, will be reversed in an attempt to show that the features attributed to Poe the man resulted from conventional novelistic devices, and are thereby effects of a fictionalised discourse. In combination with the imagined essence of Poe that Chapter 2 has advanced, the purpose of this chapter is to show the original of Baudelaire's project to be an aestheticised object, but one whose mimetic sketching was to have an important impact on Anglo-American modernistic idioms.

The two aspects of Baudelaire's project, one translational the other critical, rely for their rhetorical composition on a single element that is critical for its overall success, namely biography. The cultural context sets the first parameter: in prefaces to translations in France after 1815 'les commentaires sur la traduction souvent cèdent le pas aux commentaires sur la biographie de l'auteur et sur l'histoire'.² Having said that, biography is a pivotal constituent for Baudelaire for the reason that, in a way, the biographical notices are structurally odd or, at least, not as self-evident as they might appear at first. The universal stakes of Baudelaire's 'labour of *haute vulgarisation*'³ makes his decision to write biography⁴ next to criticism something of a riddle; therefore, seeing that Baudelaire had to base his sublimation of Poe on biographical foundations as well, a mapping effort has to ponder on how his composition accommodated both facets. Chapter 2 has shown how Baudelaire summarised the ghostly Poe in positive terms by construing a fantasy of aristocracy based on current stereotypes of the Romantic poet, gaining unprecedented popular success through the press.⁵ Now, as he proceeds to give a fuller account of Poe's life and work, he has to make sense of concrete historical details concerning the material conditions of his life as they were available to him at the time. The scarce material about Poe's life represents for Baudelaire an opportunity to arrange it into an

¹ Philippe Hamon, 'Pour un statut sémiologique du personnage', in *Poétique du récit*, ed. by Roland Barthes and others (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977), pp. 115-80 (p. 120).

² Lieven D'hulst, 'Le discours sur la traduction en France (1800-1850)', pp. 183.

³ Jones, 'Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarmé', p. 42.

⁴ A decision whereby Poe's problematic 'Americanness' enters the picture.

intelligible story,⁶ compatible with his aim, to propose a ‘geometry of his own’, as Henry James put it. This is a general problem for nineteenth century translation practice in France given that the Romantic interest in foreign literatures and their traditions, especially after Madame de Staël’s *De l’Allemagne*, has increasingly spurred a series of conflicting opinions about how the particularity of foreign works should be represented.⁷ Given the cultural hegemony of ‘le goût français’ that gave currency to the ‘belles infidèles’ (a shorthand for normative, normalising translation techniques), individual translation projects aiming to introduce foreign writers needed to solve the antinomy between the universal and the particular, if they were to appropriate the translated work in terms of a universal rhetoric.⁸ José Lambert has pointed out that ‘pour l’époque 1800-1850, la littérature est un ensemble, du point de vue diachronique comme du point de vue synchronique’; citing the example of Edgar Quinet, he stressed that the French critic was ‘le fils de son temps en dissertant sur l’“unité de littératures modernes”’.⁹ Therefore, the co-existence of an unstable series of dichotomies between traditional and contemporary literary models throughout nineteenth century gives rise to considerable tension in the way translators present their work.

In a manner that brings to mind other intriguing rhetorical dualities which have been examined in the previous two chapters – i.e. different sketches of audiencehood, perceptive binarisms in the depiction of Poe - it seems that it was crucial for Baudelaire to attempt to extract his sublime poet from history and place.

⁵ Michael Allen has shown how the press helped to install the cult of personality on a wide social scale, on both sides of the Atlantic, *Poe and the British Magazine Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 56-68.

⁶ Lyndall Gordon, biographer of T. S. Eliot, argued that ‘the impossibility of official biography may be, far from a handicap, an actual advantage, not because of the licence this offers but because of the chance to invent a new form’; see ‘T. S. Eliot’, in *The Craft of Literary Biography*, ed. by Jeffrey Meyers (London: MacMillan Press, 1985), pp. 173-85 (p. 181).

⁷ Madame de Staël, *De l’Allemagne* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1862); cf. Béreaud, ‘La traduction en France à l’époque romantique’, pp. 227-28. See also the position of Émile Deschamps, in *Un manifeste du Romantisme. La préface des études françaises et étrangères d’Émile Deschamps*, ed. by Henri Girard (Paris: Les Presses Françaises, 1923), pp. 47-50.

⁸ An illuminating case study is provided by Paul Rowe, ‘Barbaric Acts: Translating German into French in the Romantic Period’ (unpublished paper given at the 28th Annual Research Symposium “Translations: Paradigms of Linguistic and Cultural Transformation”, University of Ulster, Coleraine, 9-10 November 2001), p. 3.

Susan Bernstein, who made interesting connections between Baudelaire's aesthetic theory and his critical pieces on music, also pointed out that, for him, '[t]he universality of the aesthetic cannot be simply deduced but rather must be induced from the historical expanse of its individual and varied specifics'.¹⁰ Baudelaire does not shy away from the pressures imposed by the trivial,¹¹ the particular, the incongruous with aesthetical purity that thrive in the biographical genre. He rather tries, in recognition of these pressures enhanced by journalistic injunctions of verisimilitude, to use them, to incorporate them in his narrative so as to detach from them his ultimate idea of his original. His acknowledgement of the topical in his obsessive imagining of Poe is a pivotal challenge for his project, a project summed up by Andreas Wetzel as 'an imposition of his personal reading of Poe [...] onto the French literary scene'¹² – and not merely the Parisian republic of letters but also the concept of the 'French memory' which transcends history. This is the relation that will be addressed in this, concluding chapter.

There is no doubt that Baudelaire's biographical tale starts with Poe's death; its opening gambit is the utterance: '[c]'est un lamentable tragédie qua la vie d'Edgar Poe, et qui eut un dénouement dont l'horrible est augmenté par le trivial' (*OEP*, p. 1002). The utterance announces a narrative of 'unforgettable empathy and metaphoric daring', 'of passionate advocacy and special pleading'.¹³ Poe's life, from the moment of his death, is going to be told by Baudelaire according to the nineteenth-century poetics of biography whose constitutive elements are empathy or self-identification on the one hand, and hero-making or hero-worship on the other hand.¹⁴ Baudelaire followed a pattern of biographical writing that owes its profile to

⁹ 'Théorie de la littérature et théorie de la traduction en France', p. 164.

¹⁰ *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 146.

¹¹ Richard Holmes argued that '[b]iography finds it difficult to deal imaginatively with the mundane. And where the mundane, in its richest sense, is central to a life – as in a happy marriage, or a long and constant friendship – it is often peculiarly impotent, both in its sources (what house companions write letters to each other?) and in its narrative invention (how to describe twenty years of tender, ruminative breakfast?)'; 'Biography: Inventing the Truth', in *The Art of Literary Biography*, ed. by John Batchelor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 15-25 (p. 19).

¹² Wetzel, 'Poe/Baudelaire', p. 62.

¹³ Holmes, 'Biography: Inventing the Truth', p. 16, 22.

¹⁴ John Batchelor, ed., *The Art of Literary Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 3 and 8. For the heroic norm in biographical writing, see Thomas Carlyle's 1841 *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (Carlyle, 1897), p. 183.

Samuel Johnson's critical biography of Richard Savage,¹⁵ which brought out the 'epic possibilities of story-telling' by relating its facts 'through fictional forms'.¹⁶ This form of biography, which is 'in conflict with fiction', allows the biographer hindsight: knowing the sequence of events, he prepares the readers for them 'so that the new development, while remaining exciting, silently becomes part of the emergent pattern'.¹⁷ Compliantly, Baudelaire recounts a 'revealing and coherent life, one in which [...] all the facts go to support the central narrative'.¹⁸ Evidence of this kind of manipulation is the treatment of the fact of Poe's death, cited already. In one instance, at the end of a long treatise explaining how 'Poe était là-bas [en Amérique] un cerveau singulièrement solitaire' (*OEP*, p. 1033), Baudelaire concludes that given all this 'vous ne vous étonnerez pas que pour un pareil homme la vie soit devenue en enfer, et qu'il ait mal fini; vous admirerez qu'il ait pu *durer* aussi longtemps' (*OEP*, p. 1033). A few pages further down in the same notice, Baudelaire continues on the same vein:

Le lendemain, dans les pales ténèbres du petit jour, un cadavre fut trouvé sur la voie, - est-ce ainsi qu'il faut dire? - non, un corps vivant encore, mais que la Mort avait déjà marqué de sa royale estampille. Sur ce corps, dont on ignorait le nom, on ne trouva ni papiers ni argent, et on le porta dans un hôpital. C'est là que Poe mourut, le soir même du dimanche, 7 octobre 1849, à l'âge de trente-sept ans, vaincu par le *delirium tremens*, ce terrible visiteur qui avait déjà hanté son cerveau une ou deux fois. Ainsi disparut de ce monde un des plus grands héros littéraires, l'homme de génie qui avait écrit dans *le Chat noir* ces mots fatidiques: *Quelle maladie est comparable à l'alcool!* Cette mort est presque un suicide, - un suicide préparé depuis longtemps.
(*OEP*, p. 1037)

John Worthen summarizes the discursive importance of death-as-material in this manner: '[d]eaths in biographies are very often - by their very position in the narrative - seen not just as the necessarily final things to happen to the subjects of biographies but as culminating points, which can be used to sum up and confirm

¹⁵ The, classic by now, 1744 *Life of Savage* by Samuel Johnson, ed. by Clarence Tracy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); cf. Holmes, 'Biography: Inventing the Truth', pp. 21-24.

¹⁶ Holmes, 'Biography: Inventing the Truth', p. 24 and 23

¹⁷ John Worthen, 'The Necessary Ignorance of a Biographer', in *The Art of Literary Biography*, pp. 227-44 (p. 231).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

what the lives have really been about', 'not a documentary fact [but rather as a] biographical opportunity'.¹⁹

The biographical aspect of Baudelaire's project is patterned on a doubly grandiose scale imposed on the figure of Poe: the latter is an exquisite subject that emerges from two mega-scale discursive plots, not necessarily incompatible to one another: the human nature, on the one hand, and America, on the other. Both need to be taken into account for they constitute Baudelaire's individual reply to the overriding dichotomy that marked his époque as it passed from classicism to modernity, tending to reify, in the realm of aesthetics, the opposition between universalism and particularity.²⁰ America enters the equation as the literary geo-space that grounds the Baudelairean Poe, and helps to aggrandise him as a cultural hero of deified dimensions, as an 'excentrique destinée littéraire' (*OEP*, p. 1008). In the notices which launch a figure bearing a tragic fate (*OEP*, p. 1001-1002), we read accordingly: 'On dirait que la Nature [...] fait à ceux dont elle veut tirer de grandes choses la vie très dure' (*OEP*, p. 1014) – a clause that should be compared to the second notice's 'On dirait que la Nature fait à ceux dont elle veut tirer de grandes choses un tempérament énergique, comme elle donne une puissante vitalité aux arbres qui sont chargés de symboliser le deuil et la douleur' (*OEP*, p. 1040); '[c]ontenance, gestes, démarche, airs de tête, tout le désignait, quand il était dans ses bons jours, comme un homme de haute distinction. Il était *marqué* par la Nature' (*OEP*, p. 1015); in one instance, he uses a significant metaphor in relation to 'les glorieuses conceptions qui coupaient incessamment de leurs lueurs le ciel sombre de son cerveau' (*OEP*, p. 1016); in another, he refers to Poe's perpetual changes of residence by, '[I]l traversait la vie comme un Saharah, et changeait place comme un Arabe' (*OEP*, p. 1017) – an image extended in the simile, 'c'était un être *erratique*, une planète²¹ *désorbitée*' (*OEP*, p. 1003).

¹⁹ Worthen, *ibid.*, pp. 235, and 237.

²⁰ Claudio Guillén, *The Challenge of Comparative Literature*, tr. by Cola Franzen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 46-59.

²¹ The celestial aspect of Poe's discursive figuration seems that it had some impact on the readers of Baudelaire's prefaces; this is, for instance, the case with 'Le tombeau d'Edgar Poe', the much celebrated in literary criticism sonnet by Mallarmé, especially the suggested image of a meteor in the last strophe (*Poésies*, Paris: Gallimard, 1949, p. 130):

Calme bloc ici-bas chu d'un désastre obscur
Que ce granit du moins montre à jamais sa borne

Bearing these discursive designations in mind, it makes sense to juxtapose the two manners of magnification, one local the other of universal dimensions, so as to better understand what Baudelaire, with his aesthetic incorporation of the metaphor of translation, made of the source context. Keeping the focus especially on the element of national demarcation will allow us to grasp it as the decisive test of his transformative representation of Poe - a particular brand of denaturalisation. The American context indeed puts to the test his overall effort to sublimate Poe given that it compels him to cope with Poe's inescapable particularity, a real false note in the acculturator's plan. That said, Baudelaire's prose manages to achieve a level of verisimilitude that serves his project's successful reception: he passes the test for it displays what any successful narrative, and not only historical ones, should display, namely, 'integrity in motion': 'Readers [of history]', Louis Menand argues, 'expect an illusion of continuity, and once the illusion locks in, they credit the historian with having brought the past to life'.²² By extending the discussion of Poe's importance into the biographical realm where the claim of cultural alienation will be more securely grounded, Baudelaire installs a largely moral literary argument; this proves responsible, as Chapter 2 has shown, for a certain construction of his readers as reading subjects, as agents of moral rehabilitation.

Doubling Poe's cosmic encapsulation by nature with the nationalistic one,²³ showing how it is possible for the universal to coexist with the mortal, will pave the way for the subsequent account of the repercussions that Baudelaire's project had on the American repatriation of Poe. For the single most influential element of Baudelaire's reading of Poe that in the long run will decide the manner of Poe's re-introduction into American letters and criticism is Poe's proclaimed marginality with respect to the American literary culture.²⁴ Baudelaire writes on this matter:

Aux noirs vols du Blasphème épars dans le futur.

²² Louis Menand, 'The Historical Romance', *New Yorker*, 24 March 2003, pp. 78-82 (p. 80).

²³ Nationalistic in the sense that it represents the French preconceptions about American society and actuality.

²⁴ The theme of cultural non-alignment was also used by H. L. Mencken in his critical pronouncements about Poe, emblematic in his discussion of American Renaissance literature; see Richard Ruland, *The Rediscovery of American Literature. Premises of Critical Taste, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 123, and 127-29.

Un pareil milieu – je l’ai déjà dit, je ne puis résister au désir de le répéter, – n’est guère fait pour les poètes. Ce qu’un esprit français, supposez le plus démocratique, entend par un État, ne trouverait pas de place dans un esprit américain. Pour toute intelligence du vieux monde, un État politique a un centre de mouvement qui est son cerveau et son soleil, des souvenirs anciens et glorieux, de longues annales poétiques et militaires, une aristocratie, à qui la pauvreté, fille des révolutions, ne peut qu’ajouter un lustre paradoxal; mais *cela*! cette cohue de vendeurs et d’acheteurs, ce sans-nom, ce monstre sans tête, ce déporté derrière l’Océan, un État! – je le veux bien, si un vaste cabaret, où le consommateur afflue et traite des affaires sur des tables souillées, au tintamarre des vilains propos, peut être assimilé à un *salon*, à ce que nous appelions jadis un salon, république de l’esprit présidée par la beauté!

(OEP, p. 1055)

His explicit wish is to provide ‘une pensée *antiaméricaine*’; in a letter to Sainte-Beuve, Baudelaire described the purpose of his second text on Poe in the following words:

La première préface que vous avez vue, et dans laquelle j’ai essayé d’enfermer une vive protestation contre l’américanisme, est à peu près complète, au point de vue biographique. On fera semblant de ne vouloir considérer Poe que comme *jongleur*, mais je reviendrai à outrance sur le caractère surnaturel de sa poésie et de ses contes. Il n’est Américain qu’en tant que *jongleur*. Quant au reste, c’est presque une pensée *antiaméricaine*. D’ailleurs, il s’est moqué de ses compatriotes le plus qu’il a pu.²⁵

Overall, the magnified scale of the Baudelairean emplotment appears to be dictated on the whole by the symbolic language of his programme. It was announced already in the presumptuous ‘French memory’, the supreme receiving context of Baudelaire’s biographical and ergographical accounts. It follows, therefore, that the subject matter itself, Poe, being of paradigmatic value, needs to have a calibre that detaches him from a nation in its entirety. In translation terms, it is as though the presumed concept of target audience directly entails the blow-up of the source work which comes to acquire disproportionate dimensions. The anthropomorphic manner in which French criticism in nineteenth-century customarily describes a translated work in terms of the translated author’s culture is, to all intents and purposes, Baudelaire’s background too. Having said that, his main strategy in showing Poe’s

²⁵ *Œuvres complètes*, I: pp. 138-39.

particularity is contained in what could be called aestheticisation, a notion that suggests the essentially discursive fabrication of his subject matter.²⁶ Although Baudelaire defined earlier his original as a 'fantôme', he forewent to define its content; the rhetorical articulation of the biographical/critical narrative can, nonetheless, provide an illuminating answer to this question: it is, above all, a textual figure.

Assuming that textuality is the organising principle of Baudelaire's biographical narrative, supporting evidence can be found in one particular aspect of biographical norms, especially when they apply to translational prefaces, commentaries, etc.: this is the place and role of annotational fragments in relation to the properly authorial fragments. As G. W. Bowersock puts it, '[t]he independence of the note is guaranteed by its separation from the text, but its dependence is – or ought to be – visible from its placement at the foot of the page of text to which it refers'.²⁷ The genre depends to varying degrees on annotations, namely any material collected, sorted and processed in order to be eventually quoted as evidential support to corroborate, restrict, qualify, or comment. These resources fall within three categories: citation, explanation, and authorial comment,²⁸ and their heterogeneous nature ensures their function, which is to grant authority to a truth discourse.²⁹ It is clear that this depends on a peculiar spatial hierarchy differentiating between authorial and non-authorial discourse. A spatial distance needs to be maintained between the properly authorial text and any annotational material which by sitting, as it were, on the other side of the paginational space can act as the recipient and arbitrator of any truth claims the narrative might carry. The positioning of all forms of annotation with relation to the properly authorial corpus, being of strategic value

²⁶ What Philippe Hamon called 'l'agencement discursif à l'intérieur des énoncés'; 'Pour un statut sémiologique du personnage', p. 117.

²⁷ G. W. Bowersock, 'The Art of the Footnote', *American Scholar*, 53 (1983-84), 54-62 (p. 55).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁹ For a discussion of annotation as a means of conferring discursive authority, see Laurent Mayali, 'For a Political Economy of Annotation', in *Annotation and its Texts*, ed. by Stephen A. Barney (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 185-91; Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (London: Faber & Faber, and Harvard University Press, 1997); and Bruce Lincoln, *Authority. Construction and Corrosion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

for biographical discourse,³⁰ should be one of separation or, at least, of visible distinction. When the marking of the authorial from the referential is done not without but within the area of the main text, there is by definition and due to spatial restrictions a more limited range of demarcation means – an otherwise rich inventory of textual and para-textual spaces, footnotes, quotations, appendices, lists, references, glossaries, etc. Because its spatial differentiation is under erasure when the reference is moved into the body of the text, the legitimisation linked to a state of separatedness is altered. That is to say, the role of the annotational asides is affected by their lack of conspicuousness: the normative expectation that at all times the text should make it clear when we read a reference and when we listen to the biographer's voice is renegotiated in the text – and not always explicitly.

Within this conventional context, Baudelaire, as a general rule, makes no distinction between intra- and extra-textual space, or authorial and referential material, what is originally produced and what is borrowed.³¹ The absence of a special space designated for footnotes and other similar textual asides is the least important feature of his approach.³² What carries most weight is his idiosyncratic manner of suggesting distinctive qualities between them; this consists in fusing, in all three critical pieces, his own remarks and opinions, judgements and analyses with extended references – American biographies, Poe's own works, recorded dialogues and scenes, unrecorded dialogues, or other heteroclite types of narratives, as the evocation of Clemm, and the prayer to Poe, common wisdom, etc. Baudelaire's composition integrates such heteroclite experiences into a hybrid biographical style that creates and utterly complicates effects of truthfulness. A further illustration of this is his translation of De Quincey's work, *Un Mangeur d'opium*, that 'includes

³⁰ As A. O. J. Cockshut eloquently puts it, '[t]he difficulty of biography as an art lies mainly in this tension between interpretation and evidence'; *Truth to Life. The Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Collins, 1974), pp. 12, 13.

³¹ Margaret Gilman pointed out that, 'in very few cases does Baudelaire seem to have copied passages from the books he has been reading'; *Baudelaire the Critic*, p. 57. This 'preliminary dipping', as Gilman calls it, is evident in a number of occurrences in the texts at hand where he explicitly alludes to various literal readings of biographical sources as he remembers them.

³² In the 1852 text comprising 29 pages – in the recognisable, compact Pléiade layout – there are only 6 footnotes by Baudelaire, of one, or one and a half lines, while there are no footnotes whatsoever in the following two notices.

translation, summary, adaptation, analysis as well as personal commentary',³³ and whose heterogeneous nature has deeply problematised notions of authorship.

Baudelaire's gesture of buoyancy means that any labour to substantiate, consolidate, discuss, or comment that would otherwise go to appendices, footnotes, etc. is inevitably transferred to the interior of the narrative and is integral part of its articulation. What a stricter biographical convention would set outside the *expositio* part becomes, in these texts, a central part, integral to Baudelaire's compositional machine; what would have remained anecdotal partakes now of a holistic enterprise.³⁴ Rhetorical mechanisms such as emphasis, foregrounding, and other techniques of annotation will bring to light the dynamics of an approach that resuscitates reference as a form and experience of reading. Needless to say, to forego conventional annotational marking is not to abandon its ultimate function: the necessity of biography to authorise itself on the basis of recourse to non-authorial material of an identifiable type is not cancelled in the process - it is merely concealed. Baudelaire's techniques of incorporation maintain the authorising potential which is effectively glossed over in the emplotting effects of his prose. The most important effect of Baudelaire's annotational incorporation is a narrative *fictionalisation* or dramatisation that weaves the narrative fabric, and results in a series of imaginary dialogues, tableaux vivants, or exchanges between various cultural interlocutors, real or imaginary - including sometimes the narrator's anonymous impersonations. The present argument is grounded on the assumption that the dramatic crystallisation was a direct result of the biographer's move to engulf anecdotal material that pass, mainly, through translation. By giving this material (various representations of American voices) free rein in the biographical narrative, Baudelaire invited its undisciplined effects, in the shape of a series of cultural significations that surpass in complexity a straight aversion to American democracy. The focus will be on those fictional episodes which have the most bearings on modes of representation of the American culture. These characteristic mini-plots will be

³³ Laurent Semichon, 'Translation, Borrowing and Authorship: Baudelaire's *Un mangeur d'opium*?', in *Auctoritas: Authorship and Authority*, ed. by Catherine Emerson, Edward A. O'Brien, Laurent Semichon (University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 2001), p. 55.

³⁴ For Baudelaire's relation to the anecdotal and his time's norms, see the introduction of Claude Pichois, *Œuvres complètes*, pp. 5-20.

analysed with a view to showing that the attenuated incorporation of authenticating resources lead to a heightened effect of fictionalisation. Despite the heterogeneity of the examples or maybe because of it, the analysis, which essentially takes apart the composition of the authorial and the referential segments, proposes to show how organic critical fictionalisation is for Baudelaire's plan to extricate a singular subject from a mass society, and to celebrate in his figure aesthetic integrity.

3.1 Transatlantic repartees

The first example comes from the 1852 text, where the narrator inaugurates his biographical reconstruction of Poe by indulging in conversation with 'an American', an abstracted figure invested with human features who, without delay, starts a dissertation about the debauched life of Poe:³⁵

Si vous causez avec un Américain, et si vous lui parlez de M. Poe, il vous avouera son génie; volontiers même, peut-être en sera-t-il fier, mais il finira par vous dire avec un tone supérieur: 'Mais moi, je suis un homme positif'; puis, avec un petit air sardonique, il vous parlera de ces grands esprits qui ne savent rien conserver; il vous parlera de la vie débraillée de M. Poe, de son haleine alcoolisée, qui aurait pris feu à la flame d'une chandelle, de ses habitudes errantes.

(OEP, p. 1003)

This narrative 'construct' has the properties of a fictional hero, even an actor, as he appears to be the tangible expression of a hidden internal life embracing feelings as well as ideas. Thus, the narrator, when listening to him speaking, speculates that he might be proud of Poe: 'peut-être en sera-t-il fier [de Poe]'. This monologue is effectively initiated by an equally abstract reader (the narrator's primary interlocutor, so it seems) introduced with the pronoun 'vous':³⁶ 'si vous causez avec un

³⁵ In two occasions in this dramatised one-paragraph episode the third person is replaced by the first person: three lines from its beginning, '[m]ais moi, *je* suis un homme positif' and, in the run-up to the end of the paragraph, '[e]n avant, *dit-il*, en avant et négligeons nos morts' (OEP, 1003; emphasis added).

³⁶ Even though the grammatical ambiguity of the French pronoun 'vous' (which may be either singular or plural) allows for an interpretation that favours the amorphous multitude of readers to that of one individual, the setting of the scene seems to discard the option: in order to make sense of it, we need to visualise a privileged interaction of two different people, abstracted, but still monads – a setting which, besides, is inscribed in a classic French tradition going all the way back to Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*.

Américain, et si vous lui parlez de M. Poe', 'il vous avouera', 'il finira par vous dire', 'il vous parlera', 'il vous dira', 'vous verrez'. All these verbal clauses suggest a *bona fide* dialogue between a person native with relation to Poe, who seems to know what Poe really was (hence, 'avec un ton supérieur'), and a non-American ('vous', the French reader). Before long, the latter becomes more assertive and decides, on an emotional impulse, to challenge the American's opinions. The knowledgeable treatise of the 'American' is interrupted by the personified - or depersonalised, depending on the viewpoint - reader in what appears to be a climactic counter stance:

Et si, le cœur déjà ému à cette annonce d'une existence calamiteuse, vous lui faites observer que la démocratie a bien des inconvénients, que, malgré son masque bienveillant de liberté, elle ne permet peut-être pas toujours l'expansion des individualités, qu'il est souvent bien difficile de penser et d'écrire dans un pays où il y a vingt, trente millions de souverains, que d'ailleurs *vous avez entendu dire* qu'aux États-Unis il existait une tyrannie bien plus cruelle et plus inexorable que celle d'un monarque, celle de l'opinion, - alors, oh! alors, vous verrez ses yeux s'écarter et jeter des éclairs, la bave du patriotisme blessé lui montrer aux lèvres, et l'Amerique, par sa bouche, lancera des injures à la métaphysique et à l'Europe, sa vieille mère.

(OEP, p. 1003; emphasis in the original)

In a single stroke, the formulation, '*vous avez entendu dire*' thwarts the exclusiveness of this private scene of cultural interaction by introducing the voice of common wisdom, apparently anti-American. Before continuing, let us pause for a moment to reflect on the contradictory nature of the utterance: if the italics are there to draw the reader's attention to some consolidating evidence for the Frenchman's opinions, this would be hard to maintain given that hearsay is no more a proof than the American's plainly condescending attitude. Although the gesture seems to be that of summoning up consolidating evidence for a subjective opinion, in actual fact it does not constitute any such kind of evidence; the automatic connection between the typographical aspect of italicisation and its function - that is to say, to enhance the pragmatic meaning of whatever is italicised - has been overturned. This instance illustrates that italics is used by Baudelaire to contradict the prepositional implicature

of what is being reported,³⁷ which touches on a more general rhetorical attitude brilliantly explored by Margaret Miner. She has, in particular, identified in Baudelaire's 'Richard Wagner et "Tannhäuser à Paris"' another example similar to the one at hand, wherein Baudelaire 'applies emphasis in such a way as to conflict with both sense and syntax'.³⁸ Bearing in mind the observations made earlier about Baudelaire's marking techniques, it appears not a small matter to see the biographer stripping a relief technique of its objective discursive utility. One could sense here a sardonic move to deceive as the unquestionable earnestness of the entire scene's construction first triggers and then contradicts customary expectations activated by typographical signs.

With the following challenging words pronounced loudly by the French, intercultural debate begins; polite, albeit tense, conversation gives its place to ugly nationalistic delirium voiced mainly by the American interlocutor: 'alors, oh! alors, vous verrez ses yeux s'écarquiller et jeter des éclairs, la bave du patriotisme blessé lui monter aux lèvres, et l'Amérique, par sa bouche, lancera des injures à la métahysique et à l'Europe, sa vieille mère' (*OEP*, p. 1003; *emphasis added*). The emergence of Europe in this fictional episode of intense ideological grounding is most significant. The American, already regarded as a projection of authorial opinions or, equally plausibly, the target culture's preconceptions, becomes explicitly the mouthpiece of America itself while the 'French' is now by force a representative of Europe; abstraction is pushed forward as the monad necessary for the enactment of the scene again loses its concreteness and becomes a European voice. The interesting transformation occurs also in the clause underlined, 'l'Europe, sa vieille mère'. The French-turned-European does not simply observe his aggressor's eyes ['s'écarquiller et jeter des éclairs'], or foaming mouth [la bave du patriotisme blessé lui monter aux lèvres]; as he identifies himself with the Old World, he also qualifies the European metropolis under attack as America's 'vieille mère'. The counter-

³⁷ Paul de Man points out that '[t]he grammatical model of the question becomes rhetorical not when we have, on the one hand, a literal meaning and on the other hand a figural meaning, but when it is impossible to decide by grammatical or other linguistic devices which of the two meanings (that can be entirely incompatible) prevails'; see *Allegories of Reading* (New Haven, 1979), p. 10.

³⁸ The example is Baudelaire's phrase, '[j]e me sentis délivrer des liens de la pesanteur'; see Miner, *Resonant Gaps*, p. 57.

accusation evokes connotations of filial betrayal and thus implies, especially because it was uncalled for, a patronising attitude towards a nation allegedly in no position to criticise the metropolis. The clause ‘l’Europe, sa vieille mère’ constitutes a minor variation on the explicit presentation of America as a tyranny of the multitudes, more pervasive because unmarked: the *sotto voce* utterance, more of an aside than an actual accusation spoken aloud,³⁹ brings out a change of register. It goes without saying that the American could not have possibly defended himself against a similar, virtually unheard accusation. Moreover, the connotations of betrayal in this instance are congruous with two more designations of the projected American, as ‘un peu jaloux de l’ancien continent’, as well as ‘fier de sa *jeune* grandeur’ (*OEP*, p. 1003; emphasis added).

The quasi-nationalistic confrontation is a turning point in the scene’s composition: the reported speech it is conducted in thus far is discontinued, and is immediately followed by a treatise on the nation’s beliefs about poets. This is a more direct attempt to link the episode to a previous assertion of the biographer that, ‘[l]es divers documents que je viens de lire ont créé en moi cette persuasion que les États-Unis furent pour Poe une vaste cage, un grand établissement de comptabilité, et qu’il fit toute sa vie de sinistres efforts pour échapper à l’influence de cette atmosphère antipathique’ (*OEP*, p. 1002). A constant shift of voices accommodates that purpose. First, the narration takes on an impersonal turn: ‘L’Américain est un être positif, vain de sa force industrielle, et un peu jaloux de l’ancien continent’ (*OEP*, p. 1003) – a turn which does not altogether erase the relevance of the fictional American. Then comes a clearly macrocosmic scale, complete with vague generalisations and images of the physical and societal landscape of America, which testifies to the ambiguity of the remaining paragraph: it is very likely that the narration has made a full circle past the fictional idols, reifications of America and Europe, and into their originary core, the narrator’s ideological preconceptions. What can confidently be argued is that the fictionalisation of the American speaker allows the narrative to retain the mimetic relation to reality. The same mercurial attitude produces the concluding sentence, ‘[l]e temps et l’argent, tout est là’ (*OEP*, p. 1003), spoken by a prevalent anonymity

³⁹ Baudelaire’s determination to insinuate rather than emphasise the annotational commentary can be shown more vividly if we take into account the different intonation that

which is made more conspicuous by its close proximity to the reported, unidentified utterance, '[e]n avant, dit-il, en avant et négligeons nos morts' (*OEP*, p. 1003; *in inverted commas in the original*).

This mini-plot exemplifies the manner in which Baudelaire manipulates, on the compositional level, his authenticating devices which, in all their imaginative settings, take stock of characterisations which actively promote nationalistic reflexes current in Baudelaire's time. Similar transatlantic beliefs bringing forth a troubled dream of America are not at all rare in the intellectual climate of French criticism, as the comparative journals of the time make evident. Writing for the highly esteemed *Revue des deux mondes*, Émile Montégut pronounces America to be in a constant, inflammable, state of spiritual dependence to the Old World:

L'Amérique [...] conspire silencieusement contre l'Europe [...] l'Amérique recueille dans son sein tous les trésors de la civilisation européenne, et, certaine qu'elle sauve, elle envisage avec la plus grande indifférence l'Europe menacée par les barbares modernes [...]. La prospérité de l'Amérique est attachée fatalement à la décadence de l'Europe.⁴⁰

Furthermore, as the episode is set up with a view to chastising, in a vivid enactment, an American public blind to Poe's poetic genius, its performance appears to be questionable: the French interlocutor, the apparent arbiter in the transatlantic debate over Poe's worth, also shows signs of commonness and dogmatism, even on a minor key. Tying these points to the observations of Chapter 1 concerning Baudelaire's audience, one can read them as signs of a discourse that has incorporated current representations of American culture, earmarked for commonness. If a fictional enactment pushes ahead Baudelaire's critical attitude towards Poe's local context, it can only do so in a fuzzy way that implicates, in the final analysis, his discursive development in ideological debates.

'sa vieille mère' would require from actors were the scene adapted for the stage.

⁴⁰ 'Du génie de la race anglo-saxonne et de ses destinées' in *Revue des deux mondes*, 11 (juillet 1851), 1027-1045 (p. 1036).

3.2 Mimicry of America

Occurring after a series of vague references to American biographers who are said to be critical of the fact that Poe was no '*making-money author* [in English in the original]', and placed right before the episode just discussed, a saying is being quoted by Baudelaire in the following manner:

Dans l'une de ces biographies il est dit que, si M. Poe avait voulu régulariser son génie et appliquer ses facultés créatrices d'une manière plus appropriée au sol américain, il aurait pu être un auteur à argent, *a making-money author*; qu'après tout, les temps ne sont pas si durs pour l'homme de talent, pourvu qu'il ait de l'ordre et de l'économie, et qu'il use avec modération des biens matériels. [...] Tout cela me rappelle l'odieux proverbe paternel: *make money, my son, honestly, if you can, BUT MAKE MONEY*. – *Quelle odeur de magasin!* comme disait J. de Maistre, à propos de Locke.

(OEP, p. 1002)

The intertextual thickness of the passage is owed to a remarkable accumulation of relief techniques: viz. italicisation, capitalisation, accentuated use of punctuation and, quite revealingly, untranslated quotation (from the English original) coupled with its translation into French. Unmediated - thence (supposedly) authentic - reference is provided here at a first glance, acknowledging the readers' awareness of the foreign context, lingual as well as cultural. This reading would immediately produce a framing of the foreign culture in oppositional terms: on the one hand, the narrow-mindedness of the depicted middle American family (confirmed by the dismissing comment '*Quelle odeur de magasin!*' in French, referred properly, by name, to Joseph de Maistre⁴¹), and on the other hand the French readership, conversant with the American language and manners, and thence closer to lexicographical cosmopolitanism. This line of thought is also reminiscent of the patrician disdain for the mercantile that was promoted in the aristocratic fantasy of Poe, as seen in Chapter 2.

However, one can take a slightly different, not necessarily contradictory, angle and see the passage as a compact theatrical scene with its necessary protagonists: on the one hand, the voiceless son - most certainly Poe if we are to take

⁴¹ This quotation is taken from Joseph Marie de Maistre's *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, ou Entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence* (Paris: La Colombe, 1960).

seriously the hints dropped in the previous paragraphs, reprimanding him for not using his genius to earn money and on the other hand, the loud, overbearing father. The scene brings the 'tyranny of the opinion' America was accused for earlier on into the very bosom of bourgeois family relations wherein it takes the shape of fatherly oppression.⁴² Terms of endearment - '*my son*' - do not stop the father's house from being a prison cell in the same way as the vast expanse of the New World has been '*une vaste cage*' for Poe according to Baudelaire's visualisation. Moreover, should readers interpret literally the dismissive comment of de Maistre, they would extrapolate a proper scenery for the thespian dialogue, which is the commonplace setting of a bourgeois shop, staple of most boulevard theatre in Europe.

Congruent with this, there is an amusing variation too, in the form of the parenthetical adverbial clause '*honestly, if you can*', which modifies the pecuniary fatherly advice and alludes to the moral ambiguity of the 'American dream' mythology, along with its compulsive monetarism. At his point, another, decisive aspect of Baudelaire's authenticating process emerges, which constitutes simultaneously one of its extremities, namely, caricaturisation. The satiric vein protrudes in the ensuing emphatic capitalisation of '*BUT MAKE MONEY*', whose unbending formulation should fit the manner of the oppressive father. That said, capitalisation could also constitute a scenic reading instruction given by Baudelaire to his readers, who above all should retain the scene's pragmatic meaning concerning that particular aspect of American social life. As the son is called upon by the father's discourse to take up a money-earning activity, readers are called upon by the capitalised clause to focus on the core of what is presented to them as a pragmatic sub-content. Something similar occurs in the previous example in which the anonymously voiced '*[l]e temps et l'argent, tout est là*' sees Baudelaire's impersonator summing up the tyranny of public opinion in America in terms that

⁴² Interestingly, Georges Bataille wrote on the theme of the hideousness of middle class familial interactions in similar terms: 'In the most crushing way, the contradiction between current social conceptions and the real needs of society recalls the narrowness of judgement that puts the father in opposition to the satisfaction of his son's needs. This narrowness is such that it is impossible for the son to express his will. The father's partially malevolent solicitude is manifested in the things he provides for his son: lodgings, clothes, food, and, when absolutely necessary, a little harmless recreation. But the son does not even have the right to speak about what reality gives him a fever; he is obliged to give people the impression that for him no *horror* can enter into consideration'; *Visions of Excess*, p. 117.

European anti-Americanism would revel in. A turn of tables is, therefore, witnessed here as such a manner of referring to the foreign culture is equally accountable to charges of tyranny of opinion due to its categorical, unapologetic formulation.

However, one should keep in mind that the narrator has earlier called the readers to act as neutral onlookers and observe certain facts about Poe's life by drawing their attention to biographical information; what was actually being said in a matter-of-fact way is that Poe could have been 'un auteur à argent' – a blatant, in other words, contradiction with what the implicature of the narrative is. The factuality of the passage is corroborated by a verbatim, so it seems, quotation of the source-phrase, 'a making-money author', taken undoubtedly from a biographical work, appropriately underlined and explained in French, following basic rules of referential accuracy. It seems that paginational markers triggering clashing effects as they aim at different readership sensitivities bring about a number of complications – seemingly unprogrammable. Presuming that the biographic tale aims to accommodate Baudelaire's wish to glorify Poe by showing him within his locale, the actual manner of going about it, and especially the way in which annotation is used as one of the means of fictionalisation, makes room for some quite unexpected intricacies. These apparently uncalled for results do not seem to be accidental or marginal. The simultaneity of levels of readings motivating different cognitive, ideological, and emotional responses within his readership, as well as the fact that different value orientations do not always end in happy conciliation seem to suggest that these vagaries are rather integral to Baudelaire's project. If one puts together ridiculisation ('make money, my son, honestly, if you can'), the anonymous commonplace ('l'argent, tout est là'), the factual, descriptive voicing of what is later on to be the object of a moral accusation ('a making-money author') etc., then the orchestration of these devices which tend to pull narration towards opposite directions becomes apparent; rhetorical polysemy is widely exploited in the romanticised story of Poe's life.

3.3 A porous adulation

Next in discussing dramatisation as the engine of overlapping layers of cultural signification comes the scene that takes place when Poe meets John Pendleton

Kennedy, the chairman of the awarding committee that is to give him his first professional opportunity.⁴³ Even though the episode is adapted, fairly literally, from the obituary notice of Rufus Wilmot Griswold, it is not branded by Baudelaire as a translation.⁴⁴ The scene is described by the narrator in the third person of the simple past while the particulars of Poe's physical appearance, clothes and general attire are depicted with special pictorial care as befits a typically novelistic style:

La fortune cruelle avait donné à M. Poe la physionomie classique du poète à jeun. Elle l'avait aussi bien grimmé qui possible pour l'emploi. M. Kennedy raconta qu'il trouva un jeune homme que les privations avaient aminci comme un squelette, vêtu d'une redingote dont on voyait la grosse trame, et qui était, suivant une tactique bien connue, boutonnée jusqu'au menton, de culottes en guenilles, de bottes déchirées sous lesquelles il n'y avait évidemment pas de bas, et avec tout cela un air fier, de grandes manières, et des yeux éclatants d'intelligence.

(OEP, p. 1009)

What particularly strikes the reader is the ambiguous tone of the scene regarding the public viewing of the poet, especially vivid in the first two sentences – ambiguity in relation to the intended effect of Baudelaire's project. Although the scene might be necessary for reasons of biographical accuracy, it is nonetheless fraught with a sensationalism that makes it highly problematic for purposes of sublimation. Along the lines of the mediated material that Griswold's notice provides, Baudelaire fetishises the object of his (and our) gaze, and embraces without resistance the sensationalism triggered by the episode's depiction:⁴⁵ like a celestial body alluded to elsewhere in the notices, Poe is half-lit from the harsh light thrown on him by the contact with a literary institution – both the actual awarding committee and Baudelaire's biography. Evidence of this is the personification of 'la fortune cruelle'

⁴³ Walker, *Edgar Allan Poe. The Critical Heritage*, pp. 3-5 and 78-79.

⁴⁴ The passage goes as follows: 'Accordingly he [Poe] was introduced; the prize money had not yet been paid, and he was in the costume in which he had answered the advertisement of his good fortune. Thin, and pale even to ghastliness, his whole appearance indicated sickness and the utmost destitution. A tattered frock-coat concealed the absence of a shirt, and the ruins of boots disclosed more than the want of stockings. But the eyes of the young man were luminous with intelligence and feeling, and his voice and conversation, and manners, all won upon the lawyer's [Kennedy's] regard'; Walker, *ibid.*, p. 297.

⁴⁵ A very useful analysis for the structuring of this set of remarks was John Frow's exploration of the construction of 'character' in relation to film theory; 'Spectacle Binding. On Character', in *Poetics Today*, 7: 2 (1986), 227-50 (p. 239f).

interfering directly in human affairs to determine the man's appearance, thus endowing him with the 'physionomie classique' that society unblinkingly recognises as that of a 'poète à jeun', a poet 'with an empty stomach'. Moreover, the shabbiness of Poe's clothing, the emaciated mien, etc. are features not of an actual man, it seems, but rather of an archetype, the destitute poet. An explicit reference to theatrical make-up - the verb 'grimmé' - suggests artificiality whilst, most importantly, poetic capacity is vulgarised by being presented as an 'emploi' that requires this kind of propping and is indeed something susceptible to be attributed to whoever possesses the right qualities. All in all, the composition of the scene is much too aware of the ways of the mundane world, and the place the latter reserves for poets to adequately serve a noble project of fraternal sublimation. It is difficult to see how a sincere intention by the biographer to provoke in his readership feelings of lasting empathy towards Poe can be served by such a flagrantly staged introduction of the man. Despite the fact that it serves a purpose within the myth-building project of Baudelaire, its affected, manipulative aspect makes it hard not to read it instead as a sinister parody.

There is nonetheless another way of reading around these undermining effects. Given that the context of reference is that of a very popular institution in Antebellum America, public literary competition, one that actually started Poe's editorial career, one might see in it a cunning criticism of the American democracy and the ludicrous results of its extension into the field of artistic activity. If one assumes that the ultimate receptacle of the above, cliché-ridden description is not the Parisian but the American public, then it would make sense to present Poe's public persona obliquely, through the lenses of the American society. In this case, Baudelaire would be implying that for his fellow men, literary and not, Poe was essentially a man in need and as such he came to occupy a specific social position, not likely to change. Sentiments of sympathy and pity, whether impulsive or conditioned by sensationalism, would not be incompatible with a similar understanding of the artist in a material society. In her brilliant discussion of Benjamin's posthumous fame and the unclassifiable status of writing, Hannah Arendt points out that 'no society can properly function without classification, without an arrangement of things and men in classes and prescribed types;' and further on she

stresses that '[t]he point is that in society everybody must answer the question of *what* he is – as distinct from the question of *who* he is'.⁴⁶ It is the necessity of society to place people who author texts in a recognisable niche that this made-up scene dealing with Poe's public 'recognition' seems to be indicating. Thus, it is not surprising that we move from a quasi-synchronic depiction of Poe's outer appearance to a quick succession of verbal clauses wherein Kennedy is shown to take immediate action to improve Poe's material conditions: 'Kennedy lui parla', 'alla au plus pressé', 'le conduisit dans un magasin d'habits', 'lui donna des vêtements', 'il lui fit faire des connaissances' (*OEP*, p. 1009).

Furthermore, the same spring of ridiculisation which became evident in the citation of the American proverb, can be discerned here too; this time, though, it is effectively concealed behind the conceding use of some of the very constitutive elements of the pilloried (American) perception of Poe. It is as if Baudelaire seeks to lift a mirror to American society by copying the terms of the latter's sympathetic - but ultimately dismissive - appreciation of its author, in which the vulgar coexists with the Samaritan and where a compulsive materiality operates in the scanning of the poet from the outer layer of clothing to his very bones: 'un squelette, vêtu d'une redingote dont on voyait la grosse trame, et qui était, suivant une tactique bien connue, boutonnée jusqu'au menton, de culottes en guenilles, de bottes déchirées sous lesquelles il n'y avait pas de bas'. In fact, this lingering on the outer appearance of the young poet seems to be compatible, for Baudelaire, with an approach to literature that is particularly American as its sensational empiricism actually makes the poetic essence for ever inaccessible to it. But the most remarkable observation to be made about the episode is that Baudelaire partly uses such ludicrous elements without in the least marking them textually, and he goes on to oppose them with a clearly exalted image of the man who has 'un air fier, de grandes manières, et des yeux éclatants d'intelligence'. In this fictionalised scene, Poe appears to be disconnected from the milieu his career depends on, not interacting with it were it not to vent his own self-centred ideas and projects;⁴⁷ in this way his appeal to this milieu, whatever that may be, carries no repercussions for the purity of his being. The

⁴⁶ In Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 8, and 9.

narrative perpetuates in effect the easy, hackneyed binarism between the obvious destitution of the man and the inner genius that mass society tends to associate with the true poet.

All in all, the narrative remains so close to a poetic representation corrupted by bourgeois vulgarity that the transcendent image of Poe that Baudelaire offers by adducing to inward-looking, society-defying characteristics (the passage refers to pride, aristocracy of manners, intelligence) is too weak to counteract. By trying to establish Poe's 'excentrique destinée' in referential terms Baudelaire traces a compositional path which runs alongside vulgar representations and brings them to full view. The American context wherein Poe is symbolically placed constitutes a quite slippery referential ground for Baudelaire as it does not exorcise the risk of lapsing - or be thought to be lapsing - into the same attitude he wishes to chastise. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine a sensational image of Poe emerging from a face-value interpretation of such a scene, which is not excluded in advance by the narrative. The two implied perceptions - one vulgar, plebeian, the other exalted⁴⁸ - are not sufficiently separated within the compositional framing, as a result of which there is nothing to stop readers from taking the voice that trivialises the figure of Poe as that of his French biographer; the dramatic shape of the narrative that makes the sublime and the common transparent, put in close proximity and interaction, cannot prevent such a facile reception scenario which could jeopardise the objective of Baudelaire's biographical labour.

The seeds of misinterpretation when it comes to Baudelaire's own reception, evident in such diverging effects, have been planted by Baudelaire's own hand. They can be accounted for by hypothesising an unpronounced intention to exclude part of his readership from access to his true, non-referential 'original', that is to say, the privately imagined Poe, author of a paradigmatic work. Few can doubt that

⁴⁷ 'Poe lui [à Kennedy] ouvrit son cœur, lui raconta toute son histoire, son ambition et ses grands projets' (*OEP*, p. 1009).

⁴⁸ We witness, for instance, the poetic subject comprising both physical exteriority which is accessible to all, and the withdrawn interiority as we move beyond Poe's detailed appearance via a series of vague substantives: 'et avec tout cela [that is to say, the detailed exterior description] un *air* fier, de grandes *manières*, et des yeux éclatants d'*intelligence*'. The two segments are too close for comfort, separated just by the frugal clause 'et avec tout cela', a symbolic threshold that can be inadvertently crossed by onlookers. In other words, in the

Baudelaire was in fact influenced by Poe's own literary production.⁴⁹ Poe writes in 'Marginalia':

Our literature is infested with a swarm of just such little people as this – creatures who succeed in creating for themselves an absolutely positive reputation, by mere dint of the continuity and perpetuality of their appeals to the public – which is permitted not for a single instant, to rid itself of these *Epizæ*, or to get rid their pretensions out of sight.

We cannot then regard the microscopical works of the *animalculæ* in question as simple nothings; for they produce, as I say, a positive effect.⁵⁰

William Charvat has observed that 'in the later years, Poe thought more and more like an editor and less and less like an author. Not only are his later works more calculated attempts to catch a wider audience than his earlier ones, but he repeatedly defends authors who, like Dickens and Bulwer, deliberately write for the many as well as for the few'.⁵¹ Jonathan Elmer, commenting on the relation between originality and hack writing, has argued that,

Poe affines himself to mass-cultural aesthetics in his obsessive troubling of the notion of originality, in the seemingly shameless transposition, borrowing, mutation, and outright plagiarism of whatever materials drift into his field of concentration. Like contemporary mass-cultural fascination with remakes, retro-nostalgia, intertextual allusion, and musical sampling, Poe's practice routinely indulges in such aesthetic bricolage, even as he never calls into radical question the *principle* of originality. Any *instance* of original

course of scanning Poe's perception by his local milieu, Baudelaire gestures at the expedite rendering of the poet's exterior into his ever-fleeting psyche.

⁴⁹ Representative comparative works assessing, early on, the critical affinity between the two are: Esmé Stuart, 'Charles Baudelaire and Edgar Poe: A Literary Affinity', *Nineteenth Century*, 34 (July-December 1893), 65-80; Camille Mauclair, *Princes de l'esprit: Poe, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam* (Paris: Ollendorff, 1920); S. A. Rhodes, 'The Influence of Poe on Baudelaire', *Romanic Review*, 18 (1927), 329-33; Michaud, 'Baudelaire et Edgar Poe', pp. 666-83; Gilman, *Baudelaire the Critic*, pp. 55-114.

⁵⁰ Poe, *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 1313-14. It might be relevant to recall what Rudyard Kipling had to say, forty or so years later, about the effectiveness of the American press. Commenting on the ideas about progress a Chicago cabman expressed to him, he writes 'and by that I knew he had been reading his newspaper, as every intelligent American should. The papers tell their readers in language fitted to their comprehension that the snarling together of telegraph wires, the heaving up of houses, and the making of money is progress'. *From Sea to Sea and Other Sketches* (London: MacMillan, 1912), pp. 153-54.

⁵¹ 'Poe: Journalism and the Theory of Poetry', in *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870. The Papers of William Charvat*, ed. by Matthey J. Brucoli (Ohio State University Press, 1968), pp. 84-99 (p. 93).

production can be violated or mocked, but the principle of originality must be neither dismantled nor foreclosed.⁵²

The conditions of journalistic writing mark Baudelaire's own environment: it is well documented that he had to deal with a number of – at times brutal, as he perceived them – interventions by his publishers.⁵³ The admiration towards Poe's handling of these external pressures are manifest in this passage:

L'auteur qui, dans le *Colloque entre Monos et Una*, lâche à torrents son mépris et son dégoût sur la démocratie, le progrès et la *civilisation*, cet auteur est le même qui, pour enlever la crédulité, pour ravir la badauderie des siens, a le plus énergiquement posé la souveraineté humaine et le plus ingénieusement fabriqué les *canards* les plus flatteurs pour l'orgueil de *l'homme moderne*. Pris sous ce jour, *Poe m'apparaît comme un ilote qui veut faire rougir son maître* [emphasis added]. Enfin, pour affirmer ma pensée d'une manière encore plus nette, Poe fut toujours grand, non-seulement dans ses conceptions nobles, mais encore comme farceur.

(OEP, p. 1051; unless otherwise mentioned, emphasis in the original)

It is a well known fact that Baudelaire holds on to his acculturation project and this entails dealing with a mass reading public. A similar position is taken by Laurent Semichon who stresses that 'the primary function' of translations at the time was 'to provide target readers with what they expected, namely, "feuilletons" or stories of a dramatic nature'. Against such a backdrop, Baudelaire sought to 'be acknowledged as Poe's "official" translator, and he had therefore little choice but to set himself higher adequacy standards to distinguish himself from the [other translators]' who produced texts for the mass-market.⁵⁴ Recalling previous observations about different ways of managing different types of audiencehood, his demarcation approach can similarly accommodate extremities. Thanks to rhetorical polysemy, Baudelaire can hand over to the general public a translated work whose added-on insights into Poe's significance can be grasped only by those who already share these insights, those 'Français amis inconnus d'Edgar Poe', in Baudelaire's

⁵² *Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture and Edgar Allan Poe* (Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 36-37.

⁵³ Lemonnier, *Les traducteurs d'Edgar Poe en France*, pp. 147-153; cf. Semichon, 'Translation, Borrowing and Authorship', pp. 55, 60.

⁵⁴ 'Charles Baudelaire's Translations of Edgar Allan Poe', pp. 213, 217, and 216 respectively.

own words. Inclusion of ambiguity or polysemy of this type can be seen as a refuge against his time's 'general destabilisation of language directly related to massive developments of journalistic discourse following the invention and refinement of print',⁵⁵ with hybrid formulations constituting a bulwark, a rhetorical buffer against sensational interpretations of his original. Certainly, such a defence is not a *fait accompli*: the translator's text remains encircled, with the most intimate bonds, by pervading referential or semi-referential inscriptions celebrating aesthetic vulgarity. It would be more accurate to say that it represents a case of constant negotiation safeguarded by Baudelaire's ironic mood.

3.4 A philologist's weapons

Of an equally revealing nature is an excerpt that relates, in the midst of a straightforward account of Poe's introduction into the professional literary market, how he married his young cousin after having assured his first employment:

C'est à cet époque qu'un M. Thomas White, qui achetait la propriété du *Messenger littéraire du Sud*, choisit M. Poe pour le diriger et lui donna 2.500 francs par an. Immédiatement celui-ci épousa une jeune fille qui n'avait pas un sol. (Cette phrase n'est pas de moi; je prie le lecteur de remarquer le petit ton de dédain qu'il dans ce *immédiatement*, le malheureux se croyait donc riche, et, dans ce laconisme, cette sécheresse avec laquelle est annoncé un événement important; mais aussi, une jeune fille sans le sol! *a girl without a cent!*).

(OEP, p. 1009)

This passage exemplifies the diffuse nature of legitimisation in Baudelaire's poetics. Susan Bernstein has correctly argued that 'there is a fusion and a confusion between original composition and translating performance simulated by Baudelaire's citational practice'.⁵⁶ In this particular instance, his authorial interference is direct. Even though in the first part of the passage he acts as a ventriloquist announcer, before long he opens a parenthesis to offer a disclaimer: the previous description of

⁵⁵ For this, and a more general discussion of the interaction between 'journalistic technology', as she calls it, and lyrical expressivity in language and music, see Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 10ff. See also Alan Trachtenberg, 'Writers and the Market – I', Rev. of *Figures of Speech*, by R. Jackson Wilson, *Nation*, 248: 1 (July 1989), 23-24.

⁵⁶ Bernstein, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 141.

how Poe 'immédiatement [...] épousa une jeune fille qui n'avait pas un sol' is not his, he assures his readers with a tone as dry as that of his source⁵⁷ when presenting the event. The initially unmarked citation is subsequently marked by authorial deixis and commentary which in effect elaborates on the fact that the citation is both foreign and alien: it retrieves, on the one hand, the non-French origin of the sentence and, on the other, it considers the narrative as foreign, not only linguistically, originating in the American sourcebook but also socially, as a value accent that diverges from the narrator's target context. The narrator switches from the position of an insider to that of an outsider and thus he provides readers with two different sets of lenses to viewing reality; his is not what Sollors called 'the unreliable narrator',⁵⁸ but rather an ironic narrator who embraces two points of access to the reality of the biographical event. Thus, he sketches out 'a movement of ascent that allows him to occupy a vantage point from which he can encompass the totality of the world that now lies underneath him'.⁵⁹ His technique could also be described in terms of a narrative montage piecing together two viewpoints that would otherwise have stayed separate.

The last remark brings us, once again, to face the rhetorical variety which characterises Baudelaire's authenticating devices. The description shows that he stylistically comments the adverb 'immédiatement' with piercing clarity: first he points to 'le petit ton de dédain' that the italicised⁶⁰ adverb holds; secondly, he

⁵⁷ Rufus Griswold, from whom apparently Baudelaire translates, refers to the incident as follows: 'The late Mr Thomas W. White had then recently established *The Southern Literary Messenger*, at Richmond, and upon the warm recommendation of Mr Kennedy, Poe was engaged at a small salary – we believe of \$500 a year – to be its editor. He entered upon his duties with letters full of expression of the warmest gratitude to his friends in Baltimore, who in five or six weeks were astonished to learn that with characteristic recklessness of consequence, he was hurriedly married to a girl *as poor as himself*'; Walker, *Edgar Allan Poe. The Critical Heritage*, p. 297; emphasis in the original). Interestingly, Baudelaire's 'a girl without a cent!' is not Griswold's expression.

⁵⁸ Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, pp. 251 and 252.

⁵⁹ Paul de Man, 'Allegory and Irony in Baudelaire', in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism. The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. by E. S. Burt and others (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 101-19 (p. 110).

⁶⁰ Again, the deceptive use of italics: given that the adverb 'immédiatement' is a translation from the English original, Baudelaire's stylistic comment is not properly speaking accurate; to be indicative of a dismissive social attitude mediated by language, emphasis should have concerned the English word transcribed by Poe's biographer, not its French equivalent. When the openly authorial comment interferes directly, readers suddenly realise that all this time they were reading a translation; what they are not aware, of course, is how far back this

paraphrases its meaning on behalf of the vulgar biographer and, by reflex, his own mass audience⁶¹ – ‘le malheureux se croyait donc riche;’ then he elaborates on the fact that contempt is betrayed by ‘ce laconisme’, ‘cette sécheresse’ in the manner of announcing the marriage; and, finally, he reiterates the scandalous clause, first in French, then in its original language: ‘une jeune fille sans le sol! *a girl without a cent!*’ The gradual pacing demonstrates the philological nature of Baudelaire’s approach to the construction of cultural meaning: he introduces inscriptions of Poe’s local reception, usually by marked or unmarked utterances – e.g. third person description, untranslated passage, direct pointing, even wedging his first-person comments into the foreign, translated discourse – together with rhetorical hints calling for their rejection. From where the reader stands, there is room for both admission of the represented foreign context and negation of it. In another example of unsophisticated authorial emergence, one member of the awarding committee:⁶²

fut attiré par un manuscrit qui se distinguait par la beauté, la propreté, et la netteté de ses caractères. A la fin de sa vie, Edgar Poe possédait encore une écriture incomparablement belle. (Je trouve cette remarque bien Américaine.) M. Kennedy lut une page seul, et ayant été frappé par le style, il lut la composition à haute voix. Le comité vota le prix par acclamation au premier des génies qui sût écrire lisiblement.

(OEP, p. 1009)

Here, after having allowed his readers to contemplate a foregrounding of one of Poe’s more prosaic qualities, luring them even to go along with the praise, Baudelaire goes on to dryly dismiss the value assigned to it as ‘American’. No compositional subtlety has been motivated here as a large ideological concept, the notion of Americanness, bears down on a minor aspect of the writer’s idiosyncrasy.

revisionist comment goes. Suspension of disbelief can, thus, be seen as one of the effects of Baudelaire’s translation approach; one could only speculate as to the nature of its impact on the readers.

⁶¹ As with the proverb ‘make money’, Baudelaire’s intended audience is no longer the French ‘friends of Poe’, but rather those readers who are susceptible to share the same condescending attitude towards Poe with the American biographer of Poe – those who are interposed, in this representational legerdemain, between the narrator and his ultimate, worthy reader.

⁶² As for the particular role of the committee members, it is specified that, ‘[t]outefois, ils ne s’occupaient guère de les lire [that is to say, the texts]; la sanction de leurs noms était tout ce que leur demandait l’éditeur’ (OEP, p. 1008).

The oscillation between discretion and panache in these instances shows that Baudelaire's management of references is more a matter of calculated tension than it is of balance.⁶³

The fashion of mutual dependence – which, by the way, does nothing much to make the recounting impermeable to sensationalism – becomes clear when the narrator proceeds to stylistically comment, in his own voice, upon what was previously written down in order to show the patronising arrogance that typifies a mercantile society. The two different systems of valorisation are simultaneously present in that they co-operate to structure the account even as incompatible markers. The peculiar strategy finds its possible source of inspiration in Poe's work. In 'Marginalia' Poe writes that '[i]n general, we should not be over-scrupulous about niceties of phrase, when the matter at hand is a dunce to be gibbeted. Speak out! – or the person may not understand you'.⁶⁴ As Jonathan Elmer showed, 'Poe subjects the relation between reading and originality to a kind of temporal reversal, a sort of retrograde motion: thus, the excremental and formless mass, which will reveal and misrecognize our words, does not, it turns out, follow after us, but rather is first received by us, in the form of something like received opinion; it precedes us as our own reading'.⁶⁵

According to the hypothesis formulated earlier, the text addresses at the same time both the elected reader and the mass public, therefore it has to be deployed in ways that exclude the latter. These can vary from subtle compositional modes that require some degree of metalinguistic awareness – as, for instance, with the unmarked mimicry⁶⁶ of the poet's physical appearance for his American judges – to direct, first-person interference of the narrating 'I'. What is significant here is how the unmarked linearity of the narration is overthrown with the intrusion of the 'I': it comes *après la lettre* to name and to disown. Baudelaire's intervention has a significant erosive power for it discloses the mediated nature of the original,

⁶³ The biographer of William Carlos Williams, Paul Mariani uses an expression that particularly suits this type of handling: he talks of 'a calculus of indeterminacy'.

⁶⁴ *Essays and Reviews*, p. 1317.

⁶⁵ Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ For the notion of mimicry, cf. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in *October: The First Decade, 1976-1986*, ed. by Annette Michelson and others (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 317-25.

biographical material; the discursive commentary of Baudelaire lays bare the fact that this material came to him and, through him, to his readers, 'overlaid by interpretation'.⁶⁷ As a result and precisely because his own commentary does not pre-empt but follows the reference, its reach can conceivably exceed the relevant section and colour it to a far larger extent.

Furthermore, the first-person intervention of the biographer presents an image of him as a privileged reader who literally underlines the 'immédiatement' of the foreign resource and goes on to ask the readers of his own tale to revisit the transcribed utterance in the light of his interposed commentary. In other words, the doctored version he offers of the American biography requires his readers to connive with his mediation⁶⁸ – a direct result of his demarcation style. As far as translation is concerned, it is as though a constant effort has been made to deny that the raw material of the critical essays involved translational labour, only to acknowledge it, later on, by accepting its necessary corollary, namely, hermeneutic interpretation.⁶⁹ Once again, Baudelaire proves to be the mediating translator who has tied his image and voice to that of primary sources in such a way as to make it impossible to disentangle the two. As Theo Hermans has pointed out, when discussing translation representations, '[f]or every instance of consonance [...], there is also dissonance, and hence the likelihood of mismatch, of manipulation and misuse'.⁷⁰ Baudelaire's notices have crystallised a situation in which the new generations of Poe's readers in French will have, as they listen to the superimposed voice of Baudelaire, to discover a Poe that lies beneath the visible surface of the American representations - not a

⁶⁷ Batchelor, *The Art of Literary Biography*, 5.

⁶⁸ Susan Bernstein described the process much more eloquently: 'In reorganising the time of reading, Baudelaire shifts from recounting his experience of reading to performing it as he establishes a new present in his own text. [...] The present instance of discourse implies a simultaneity of writer and reader, a cotemporality and proximity inscribed in dialogue. This bond between subjects is figured first of all through the relationship of reading'; *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 141.

⁶⁹ Representations requiring translation to approximate 'pure resemblance', mean, according to Theo Hermans, 'that all traces of the translator's intervention in the text be erased. The irony is that those traces, those words, are all we have, they are all we have access to on this side of the language barrier'; 'Translation's Representations', *Sygekrisi/Comparaison*, 9 (October 1998), 14-30 (pp. 17-18). This irony is the quintessence of Baudelaire's annotational approach, not to say of his entire employment of Poe's life.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

transcendental one but, simply, Baudelaire's own conception of him. As Andreas Wetzel showed:

To the extent that referential specificity is present at all [in Baudelaire's project], it is contained in the prefaces, where Baudelaire explains to the French reader the context of Poe's life, presented [...] as the logical effect of Poe's dedication to his poetic vocation, a view that is largely the product of Baudelaire's own conception of the condition of the artist. In this way, Poe's life as well as his theory becomes integrated as part of the interpretative system into the total literary phenomenon presented by Baudelaire's translation.⁷¹

3.5 Fertilised by Maria Clemm

The last significant instance is related to the presentation of Maria Clemm, a person who seems to have kept Baudelaire's interest throughout the composition of his project. In his 'Lettre à Clemm', she emerges as a singular person endowed with powers of intercession, a symbol of Poe's redemption during his lifetime. As such, Clemm equals Baudelaire's plan to become - via his criticism and translations - the medium of Poe's literary glorification posthumously; for instance, he exclaims, 'Comme cette pauvre femme se préoccupe de la réputation de son fils!' (*OEP*, p. 1013). Baudelaire describes in the third person her mediating role in Poe's life in a quite distanced tone initially: '[Maria Clemm, Poe's mother-in law] était profondément attachée à Poe. Elle l'accompagna à travers toutes ses misères, et elle fut effroyablement frappée par sa fin prématurée' (*OEP*, p. 1012). Immediately afterwards, the tone of the narrative becomes appraising - 'Le lien qui unissait leurs âmes ne fut point relâché par la mort de sa fille', - and tangibly more dramatic in the poised acceleration of nominal clauses in the penultimate sentence: '[u]n si grand dévouement, une affection si noble, si inébranlable, fait le plus grand honneur à Edgar Poe' (*OEP*, p. 1012). The rest is series of encapsulated texts: Baudelaire translates a passage written by Nathaniel Parker Willis, that praises Clemm's repeated appeals in favour of Poe in times of distress,⁷² and then the included letter

⁷¹ Wetzel, 'Poe/Baudelaire', p. 68.

⁷² For the original of this translated passage, see Walker, *Edgar Allan Poe. The Critical Heritage*, pp. 311-12. A comparison with the original would reveal great many similarities that consolidate it as Baudelaire's source of inspiration for his figuration of Clemm.

which was supposedly written by her upon the news of Poe's death. The portrait is consummated by Baudelaire's hymnology of the woman:

Comme cette pauvre femme se préoccupe de la réputation de son fils! Que c'est beau! que c'est grand! Admirable créature, autant ce qui est libre domine ce qui est fatal, autant l'esprit est au-dessus de la chair, autant son affection plane sur toute les affections humaines! Puissent nos larmes traverser l'Océan, les larmes de tous ceux qui, comme ton pauvre Eddie, sont malheureux, inquiets, et que la misère et la douleur ont souvent traînés à la débauche, puissent-elles aller rejoindre ton cœur! Puissent ces lignes, empreintes de la plus sincère et de la plus respectueuse admiration, plaire à tes yeux maternels! Ton image quasi divine voltigera incessamment au-dessus du martyrologe de la littérature!

(*OEP*, p. 1013)

If this is not a prayer, it certainly has all its typical characteristics, most central of which is the divinisation of the figure of Clemm to whom endless power of compassion is attributed, not only for Poe but for all the disquiet, suffering souls. The earnestness of the hymnody is unquestionable, and enduring as some of its elements found their way into Baudelaire's letter to Clemm that is to be written two years later; its hieratic nature strongly emphasises the emploted nature of Baudelaire's account. The kind of claim Baudelaire makes for this figure as an authenticating means can make sense if we take into account that Clemm happens to be originated from Poe's own, otherwise inimical, local environment. She was, therefore, a figure ideally placed to suit Baudelaire's overall purpose, susceptible to be exalted by the French translator. The continuous exclamations of the above passage seem to indicate a primary discovery which needs to be preserved as an ever-new event despite the obvious fact that it is enacted by Baudelaire for his readers; this litany of adulating exclamations captures the glistening moment that Clemm became Baudelaire's essential ally in his glorification plan. Baudelaire spreads layer upon layer of exaltation until the moment when the improbable prayer consumes each individual effect by metamorphosising the woman into a superb, maternal spirit: we can enumerate, in sequence, the matter-of-fact description, the proper citation of Willis's 1849 notice, 'Death of Edgar A. Poe' (a nearly unique occurrence in Baudelaire's essays), and, lastly, an additional hymnody which conceals its fictional

character behind the format of an awe-inspiring revelation. A more sombre description of Maria Clemm seems to follow the same pattern of exaltation:

Cette femme m'apparaît grande et plus qu'antique. Frappée d'un coup irréparable, elle ne pense qu'à la réputation de celui qui était tout pour elle, et il ne suffit pas, pour la contenter, qu'on dise qu'il était un génie, il faut qu'on sache qu'il était un homme de devoir et d'affection. Il est évident que cette mère – flambeau et foyer allumés par un rayon de plus haut ciel – a été donnée en exemple à nos races trop peu soigneuse du dévouement, de l'héroïsme, et de tout ce qui est plus que le devoir. N'était-ce pas justice d'inscrire au-dessus des ouvrages du poète le nom de celle qui fut le soleil moral de sa vie? Il embaumera dans sa gloire le nom de la femme dont la tendresse savait panser ses plaies, et dont l'image voltigera incessamment au-dessus du martyrologe de la littérature.

(OEP, p. 1039)

The purpose for this type of fictionalisation is provided in the last sentence - 'ton image quasi divine voltigera incessamment au-dessus du martyrologe de la littérature [with or without exclamation mark]' - in the evocation of literature, overviewed by her spiritual persona, in a grandiloquent imaginative transformation which has, more or less, taken the place of authentication.⁷³ In chapter I the pageant consecration of both Clemm and the republic of letters was viewed as a tableau vivant staged by Baudelaire in order to endow the literary institution with some form of organicity conferred to it via the figure of Clemm. A similar function is performed in the sentence 'puissent ces lignes, empreintes de la plus sincère et de la plus respectueuse admiration, plaire à tes yeux maternels!', echoing a dedication found in his letter to her: 'Aujourd'hui, ce n'est pas seulement le plaisir de montrer ses beaux ouvrages [Poe's] qui me possède, mais aussi d'écrire au-dessus le nom de la femme qui lui fut toujours si bonne et si douce. Comme votre tendresse pansait ses blessures, il embaumera, lui, votre nom avec sa gloire' (OEP, p. 3). If there is a motive of empowerment with respect to Baudelaire's critical narration, it is well

⁷³ A similar case of symbolical manipulation, whereby the privileged target reader determines the 'special power of "powerlessness"' is explored by Sue Zemka; see 'The Holy Books of Empire: Translations of the British and Foreign Bible Society', in *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-Century Literature: Nationalism, Exoticism, Imperialism*, ed. by Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), pp. 102-37 (pp. 124-25).

hidden behind the emotional lyricism of this panopticon⁷⁴ where the person who redeemed Poe during his lifetime is anointed to a kind of literary ambassador. The fusion of the two is mutually beneficial as, on the one hand, the figure of Clemm is authorised to supervise⁷⁵ a public domain and, on the other hand, the literary establishment is turned into some kind of a repository of martyrs - 'martyrologe de la littérature'.

In other words, Baudelaire eventually gives moral and spiritual priority not to the need to authenticate the person of Clemm (and, by extension, his own project of redemption) by connecting her to the literary institution, but rather to humanise the latter; it seems that the literary establishment has, in the end, more to gain in its represented encounter with the human person. This interpretation is to some extent corroborated by the first lines of the paragraph where Clemm is being praised on the grounds of the principle, 'autant ce qui est libre domine ce qui est fatal, autant l'esprit est au-dessus de la chair'. What seems to be implied in these lines is that the virtues of the person who transcended her locality's 'fatal' constraints – be these prejudices and narrowness of mind, as well as material misery – by lifting herself above what constitutes the inescapable reality of cultural specificity, proves to be a living example of the possibility of transcendence in general. For that reason she needs to be recognised as such – and to do so is to make use of the hieratic language that is usually reserved for saints and deities: this is precisely Baudelaire's rhetoric.

Here, moreover, we can realise the particular value that historical reality maintains for Baudelaire's project as the screen on which his figures are projected so that his readers can grasp their emblematic achievements. This screen is by definition alien to his emplotment because it is heterogeneous, incongruous and resisting rhetoric integration in the most practical sense. Even though the previous chapter has to some extent touched upon this theme, it has to be stressed from this viewpoint too how invaluable the 'fatality' of the 'flesh' really is as the translator wishes to extricate from it the miraculous nature of transgression in art. Baudelaire seems to be implying that Poe's aesthetic achievements resonate in Clemm too, who becomes in

⁷⁴ The panoramic view of the tableau is expressed both in geo-historic terms, with the reference to the crossing of the ocean and in non-historic terms of sublimation, with the metaphor of a high-flying spirit.

⁷⁵ The choice of the verb - 'voltiger au-dessus' - is significant in this respect.

the biographer's imagination the person who could push aside the thick veil dropped on Poe by the particular conditions of their time and place, and loved him unconditionally, and supported him indefatigably. While quoting Willis's passage, Baudelaire writes: 'et jamais [...], ne permettant à ses lèvres de lâcher une syllable qui pût être interprétée comme un doute, une accusation, ou un amoindrissement de confiance dans le génie de son fils' (*OEP*, p. 1013). As the purity of Poe had to be detached out of a maze of inimical material (which Baudelaire copied and translated in his composition), Clemm had also to be exalted above her local culture in order to be depicted as the mother who loved her son and cared for his reputation; her respect for Poe is presented as opposed to her own locale by Baudelaire, who thus showcases how carefully his symbolical allies are being selected.⁷⁶ It automatically follows that such an enigmatic person, whose actions were explained by recourse to her environment but only in a setting of detachment and elevation, can only be:

pur, désintéressé et sain comme la garde d'un esprit', continuant 'son ministère d'Ange, vivant avec lui, prenant soin de lui, le surveillant, le protégeant, et quand il était emporté au-dehors par les tentations, à travers son chagrin et la solitude de ses sentiments refoulés, et son abnégation se réveillant dans l'abandon, les privations et les souffrances, elle *demandait* encore pour lui.

(*OEP*, p. 1013)

For the ultimate aim of her ministry, Baudelaire's tale suggests, was something more than plain material survival and well-being; it was a deeply rooted belief in Poe's genius and as such it could only be projected into the future, a rarefied reality which is what Baudelaire has singled out as the most suitable vehicle for his emplotment of Poe.

⁷⁶ The choice of this ultimate friend of Poe, with whom Baudelaire, a voluntary brother and a shameless misogynist, wishes to unite his voice, is understandably a woman, and in particular a mother. Bearing in mind the transcendence that underpins his emplotment, the ideologically-ridden mother archetype - albeit hyper-sentimental in such an exhaustive treatment Baudelaire reserves for it - constitutes an ideal carrier. In symbolic language, it is required to perform a vast leap which means, bluntly, that its situated personality is being rejected.

In guise of conclusion

In Poe's 'Purloined Letter', possession of the letter bestows power, whereas use of the letter deducts from the power conferred⁷⁷. In a similar manner, Baudelaire possesses knowledge about Poe's life, as well as his inner significance and value, which confers authority to him in his capacity as a translator, biographer and cultural mediator; however, due to the sensationalism of the local teaching of Poe, his private perception risks being degraded as soon as it is disseminated. What his narrative implies, in the light of this peril, is a reversal of terms: the current knowledge of Poe hides the truth about him, a truth awaiting to be unveiled by anyone who will complete a journey encompassing both figurations. Therefore, the truth, the obsessive need to appropriate what haunted Baudelaire, will not simply be contained in his narrative; it will rather be implied in the authorial itinerary between the self and the non-self of the American representations. The two are rhetorically blended and separated only in value. Both plots work alongside to produce eventually a withdrawn truth about Poe, still to be extricated by readers over time. The effect is one of dispersal: the personal vision of Poe is entrusted to posterity, a receptive medium exceeding the locality constraints, both French and American. The unexpurgated ambiguity of the narrative encapsulates, therefore, a deferral of meaning that is not solved by the authorial self: taken forward by the narrator, to be sure, it is deposited in the French memory. The Baudelairean project was aimed at instituting Poe as 'une échantillon de la beauté universelle'⁷⁸ by refusing its own positionality;⁷⁹ part of its reception, however, will be based on a localised reading of its composition and, especially, the mimicry of Poe's American context. This is the moment when Baudelaire's project enters the American critical scene in the early twentieth century. This, the second wave of Poe's modern education, is also the moment when the Baudelairean texts produce their highest impact.

⁷⁷ For the tale itself, see Mabbott, *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, III: pp. 972-97. For the captivating 'political-economy' analysis of Poe's work, see Terence Whalen, 'Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy', *American Quarterly*, 44: 3 (September 1992), 381-417 (pp. 392-94). A similar insightful approach, although with a different emphasis, was explored by Donald Pease, *Visionary Compacts*, pp. 158-202.

⁷⁸ Margaret Gilman, 'Le cosmopolitisme de Baudelaire et l'Espagne', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 16e année (1936), 91-97 (p. 92).

⁷⁹ Martin, & Mohanty, 'Feminist Politics', pp. 207-208.

PART II

Poe francised

Chapter 1. William Carlos Williams defending Poe

Poe is the noun. Baudelaire is the adjective.

Part I has broken down Baudelaire's critical project into the elements constituting its rhetorical composition: these concern readership, nature of the original, and its discursive construction. Part II shall try to account for the American reception of Poe through the impact the French project had on three seminal essays: William Carlos Williams's 1925 'Edgar Allan Poe', T. S. Eliot's 1948 'From Poe to Valéry', and the extended section on Poe in Aldous Huxley's 1930 'Vulgarity in Literature'. In a quasi-inverse process, then, the rhetorical elements of Baudelaire's project will be re-assembled to show possible contact zones with the configuration of Poe in these influential texts. The starting point is the assumption that the image of Poe the American critics work on originates to a significant extent in Baudelaire's deviant reading. As Donald Pease puts it:

With the new French inflection of his work, Poe has acquired a prominence as a figure at once translated by the French into a different cultural context yet one also capable of translating or rather "domesticating" this otherwise utterly strange context into accessible terms. Given the use to which his work is put, however, Poe seems less an author whose work the French wish to subject to lengthy analysis and more a tutelary spirit capable of sanctioning new directions in their own work.¹

One recent contribution to the increasing in volume Poe bibliography states: 'Interest in Poe's writing is once more on the rise. But his newfound success is primarily due to his status as a sophisticated émigré, one who speaks a distinctly accented brand of English'.² As a result, these English meta-texts are dealing with what one could define as an adulterated or corrupted version of Poe that inevitably reaches them through the 'noise' of his French general education, led by the critically enhanced Baudelairean translations. The inception moment of the long and twisted process of

¹ 'Marginal Politics and "The Purloined Letter": A Review Essay', in *Poe Studies*, 16: 1 (June 1983), 18-23 (p. 18).

Poe's European canonisation, Baudelaire's project, is therefore considered to be the context in which these influential twentieth-century critical readings of Poe's work are to be understood.³

Before crossing the Atlantic, however, it should be pointed out that the assumed context of Baudelaire's project is not fixed as such, except symbolically and for purposes of discovery. Being the background against which the Anglophone pronouncements are examined, one should bear in mind that it can be re-read too in the light of the responses it caused within the French literary and cultural context. In other words, the critical responses which were selected out of a number of possible reading repertoires can be said to constitute the Baudelairean project's own reception in America, not necessarily parallel to the European fortune of Poe; this shift diverted attention from the original source, Poe, to one of its reading frames, Baudelaire's project, which then becomes a surrogate original for the purposes of its contemporary readers. It is in this light, for instance, that Thom Gunn writes in his poem, 'Readings in French':

Though Edgar Poë writes a lucid prose,
Just and rhetorical without exertion,
It loses all lucidity, God knows,
In the single, poorly-rendered English version.⁴

By necessity then, the three critical approaches to Poe illustrate the manner in which the meaning of this revisionist project changed according to new receiving schemes. Although such an exploration has a tangential interest for Baudelaire scholarship, it decidedly falls outside the framework of this study; it deserves, nonetheless, some consideration if only as a reminder of the situatedness of both poles of Poe transatlantic reception. For if Baudelaire's project is posited as the originator of the Anglophone texts, it is so only in abstracted terms, as a relevant and illuminating means of contextualising the different reading regimes of Williams, Eliot and

² Shawn Rosenheim and Stephen Rachman, eds., *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. ix.

³ The same assumption is expressed by Rosenheim and Rachman: 'This theoretical appropriation [the psychoanalytic approach to Poe] is only the most recent stage in a French tradition of reading Poe that begun with Baudelaire'; *ibid.*, p. x.

⁴ Thom Gunn, *My Sad Captains and Other Poems* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), p. 20.

Huxley.⁵ The challenge being to foreground one regime as the meaningful context of the other, it is necessary to keep the hypothetical frame stable for just long enough to examine how discursive stability in each regime is shattered by their contagiousness in the workshop of critical enunciation.

In the year 1925 William Carlos Williams wrote an essay on Edgar Allan Poe which he included in his essayistic anthology, *In the American Grain*.⁶ The 1920s was a time when Williams, together with Ezra Pound, reflected on the role of poetry with a distinctly American focus; but, contrary to Pound, he promoted an 'indigenist' and 'nativist' stance in works such as *Spring and All* (1923), *The Great American Novel* (1923), and *In the American Grain* (1925).⁷ The latter is summarised in *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* in the following way: 'In twenty impressionistic essays on significant persons of the western hemisphere, chronologically from Eric the Red to Lincoln, and including Cotton Mather, Franklin, and Poe among writers, Williams treats the ways in which these men viewed new worlds, often employing their own words so as to convey their ways of vision and expression'.⁸ Williams clearly turns to the national past in order to look there for models that could help to bring about a re-definition of the Native. In the opinion of Ned Stucky-French, *In the American Grain* is a seminal work in which Williams 'puzzl[es] out how American traditions, the essay, and modernist form might intersect'; he asserts that, '[i]n it he not only re-examines several of the nation's key documents and cultural moments, he also struggles to find a new way to write about them'.⁹ As for the intensity with which he envisaged his poetic task as coterminous with the future course of

⁵ For a justification of this theoretical approach, as well as a further elaboration on its functioning and intricacies when particularly applied onto a particular case study, see the Introduction.

⁶ 'Edgar Allan Poe', in *In the American Grain. Essays* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966; rpt. Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 216-33. Hereafter abbreviated *EAP*, with page numbers in parentheses in the body of the text.

⁷ Hugh Witemeyer, ed., *Pound/Williams. Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams* (New York: New Directions, 1996), p. 49.

⁸ James D. Hart, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, ed. by Phillip W. Leininger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 316.

⁹ Ned Stucky-French, 'An Essay on Virginia': William Carlos Williams and the Modern(ist) Essay', *American Literature*, 70: 1 (March 1998), 97-130 (pp. 97, 98).

American poetry, a passage recording, in 1917, his reaction to Eliot's 'Prufrock' is significant:

I had a violent feeling that Eliot has betrayed what I believed in. He was looking backward; I was looking forward. He was a conformist, with wit, learning which I did not possess. He knew French, Latin, Arabic, God knows what. I was interested in that. But I felt he had rejected America and I refused to be rejected and so my reaction was violent. I realized the responsibility I must accept. I knew he would influence all subsequent American poets and take them out of my sphere. I had envisaged a new form of poetic composition, a form for the future. It was a shock to me that he was so tremendously successful; my contemporaries flocked to him – away from what I wanted. It forced me to be successful.¹⁰

The usual injunction of avant-garde communities to grasp the *Zeitgeist* of the present is transformed, with Williams's work, into pursuing an 'urgent contemporaneity',¹¹ activated in a critical appropriation of past figures, like that of Poe. In Williams's own epigraph to the volume, he specifies that 'I have tried to separate out from the original records some flavor of an actual peculiarity the character denoting shape which the unique force has given' (*EAP*, p. 1971, p. 5). However, the 'nativistic' outlook of Williams' campaign does not exclude cosmopolitanism – it rather feeds on it. The writing of the anthology itself is preceded by an extended trip to Europe, where Williams made, or renewed contacts with expatriates, promoted literary projects – an attitude which makes it clear that he meant his work not 'to be excluded from the international stage'.¹²

The essay included in this 'artful' anthology formulates and defends a conception of Poe as 'a genius intimately shaped by his locality and time', a 'genius of *place*' (*EAP*, p. 216). The assertion is never proven as such by Williams, and only once are we allowed to glimpse at its underpinning logic as it shines through the italicised segments of the following inference: 'What he [Poe] wanted was connected with no particular place; therefore it *must* be where he *was*' (*EAP*, p. 220). It is astounding, in a way, to see how Williams casts aside the long contrariety around Poe's Americanness in a single enunciative gesture: he purely and simply intimates

¹⁰ *Imaginations*, ed. by Webster Schott (MacGibbon & Kee, 1970), p. 4.

¹¹ See Sacvan Bercovitch, *Cambridge History of American Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), VIII: pp. 88-89.

to the readers the bond between the man and his place of birth in such a way so as to suggest that it precedes any aesthetic consideration; in fact, its precedence seems to become stronger as the artistic work under discussion does not attempt to assume it. If there is no trace of properly American subject matter to be found in Poe's prose and poetry, if there is no territorial connection to be made on thematic grounds, this leaves only the native land on which to base an assumption of his belonging; locality is the artist's default mode of being,¹³ Williams seems to be implying. The impression that the statement gives is that of a response to a logical impulse, firmly determining the general tone of Williams's narrative. All in all, the argument belongs to a peculiar type of empiricism, something indicated also in his other statement about Poe: 'He is American, understandable by *a simple exercise of reason*' (*EAP*, p. 222; emphasis added). The bond between locality and art becomes an axiomatic principle, a structuring notion with the power to transcend even apparent antinomies.

Both of these excerpts constitute a speculation about Poe which basically attempts to make cultural connections by recourse to sound reasoning; in them, the two dissimilar realms, art and locality, are brought together in a manner that submits the former to the strength of the latter, thus reinforcing the rational weight of the stance. However, if one brought into the equation the background of a long series of debates about Poe's American reputation, the link Williams attempts to make would then seem a strategic selection. Although the causal argumentation seems to be stating merely the obvious, it actually counts on being perceived as doing so by circumventing the ideologically charged arguments surrounding this issue, and by steering past committed critical quarters. That is to say, against an already exacerbated context of critical debate, the essay sought to promote its objectives by selecting a means of reasoning, common sense, self-evidence that should yield more fruits; as good sense sweeps in one laconic gesture the societal controversy, the

¹² Witemeyer, *Selected Letters*, pp. 49-50.

¹³ This phrasing also corresponds to Williams' axiom stated in his polemic essay 'A Point for American Criticism', in which he assaults the core of Rebecca West's judgment of James Joyce. The locality argument takes there the form of an opposition to a 'transcendental dream in which the spirit is triumphant – somewhere else. Whereas *here* is the only place where we know the spirit to exist at all [...], here on earth in mud and slime today'; *The Williams Carlos Williams Reader*, ed. by M. L. Rosenthal (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1966), p. 380.

essayist reaches a broader audience.¹⁴ Thus, Williams' reading of Poe is grounded on territoriality alone for the notion relies on deeply embedded beliefs of belonging that have the capacity to illusively mask, even for a limited time, the extent and intricacy of these debates. This does not mean that Williams's discourse does not partake of the conflictuality that grounds Poe's perceived significance in the American context (this being mainly a peripheral literary position); it rather means that it has integrated such antinomies into his overriding definition of locality, as will be shown presently.

In conjunction with this type of grounding, Williams is also very cautious in his choice of terms by which to describe Poe's meaning. Firstly, he systematically shies away from an overbearing, value laden vocabulary of national deixis such as American nationality, or Americanness; also, when he proposes to drop the clause 'New World',¹⁵ in favour of the 'new locality', he glosses the cautiousness he himself exhibits as a need 'to leave that for a better term' (*EAP*, p. 216). He, then, opts for a neutral, non-specific nominal range including terms such as 'ground', 'place', 'locality', and the 'local'. Lexical purity is also implied in that, when he digresses to posit the need of the American culture to evolve, he looks into the canonised past, and refers to the ancient Greek etymology of the word 'culture': 'Culture is still the effect of cultivation' (*EAP*, p. 224); the adverb 'still' indicates the demonstrative impulse of an otherwise uncontested attempt of validation. A poet himself, Williams appears to be picking his dialectical weapons from the arsenal of poetic or originary realm¹⁶ rather than that of professional, more conventional criticism. It is undeniably an optimisation strategy, but also one that intrinsically befits the essence of his effort. For it seems to be the case that by initiating his defence of Poe on the basis of

¹⁴ Robert Ezra Park discussed the respective disadvantages regarding the diffusion of nonmaterial artefacts, such as political, artistic or religious. Because of their potential to upset existing social institutions and impair 'the ability of a people to act collectively [...] consistently and in concert', '[d]iffusion takes place more easily when the social unity is relaxed'; Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe, Collier-MacMillan, 1964), p. 47.

¹⁵ Apparently, the 'New World' seems to be a clause Williams prefers to others, but even in this preference one can see the same emphasis he puts on the principle of newness, the cornerstone of his defence of Poe.

¹⁶ It is noticeable that the editor of Williams's *Imaginations*, Webster Schott, remarked the same originary rhetoric: 'William Carlos Williams forces the kinds of questions we address to natural disasters, reports of miracles and works of genius. How? Why? From what inexplicable source?'; *Imaginations*, p. ix.

territoriality he grounds his own rhetoric on territoriality, on what has always been there *avant la lettre*, on the ground.

Elocutionary choices such as the above tend to eclipse the fact that the essay hurriedly moves on to appropriate a language of self-recognition and 'solicitation of complicity' in its addressees:¹⁷ 'Americans have never recognized themselves. How can they? It is impossible until someone invent the ORIGINAL terms. As long as we are content to be called by somebody's else terms, we are incapable of being anything but our own dupes' (*EAP*, p. 226). Within the same utterance, standard essayistic language treating its subject matter with some distance, and implying a non-specific, homogeneous addressee (cf. 'Americans', 'they'), concedes its place, without further delay, to a narrative in the first person plural ('we', 'our'). The change of focus is conspicuous, as well as the confessional overtones of an acknowledged insufficiency which goes hand-in-hand with a sense of empowerment: the rhetorician wishes to directly engage his audience by bending the neutrality of a general statement to accommodate a stirring discourse of lived experience. Such a rhetorical use of pronouns brings the essay close to the genre of founding texts addressing the nation. In the 'Declaration of Jefferson and of the Congress', for instance, the revolutionary break is operated through a passage from the litany of third-person utterances (with 'he' referring to England's George IV) of the first section to the American citizens' 'we' of the second section.¹⁸ A rhetorical shift of this type rekindles the urgency surrounding the issue of Poe's Americanness which was for a short while defused in its initial, commonsensical statement. This is the reason why the remarks made earlier about the neutrality of Williams's thesaurus of 'locality' do not contradict Jonathan Elmer's observation, but rather add a nuance to it; he argues that 't]here is a fierceness about Williams's essay, an insistent and positive incantation of the words 'beginning', 'ground', and 'originality', which finds its corollary emphasis in images of rejection and repudiation'.¹⁹ The gathering

¹⁷ Ted Cohen, 'Metaphor, Feeling and Narrative', *Philosophy and Literature*, 21: 2 (October 1997), 223-44 (p. 239).

¹⁸ Garry Wills, *Inventing America. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1978), p. 374-79.

¹⁹ Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit*, p. 34.

polemical tone of the essay is evident in its conative, even emotive²⁰ articulation and in the strategic placing of personal or possessive pronouns which evoke a nationally unified, if varied, audience. The conative nature of the essay enhancing its public-address, declarative features is indicated in the following examples:

- Poe was not a ‘fault of nature’, ‘a find for French eyes’, ripe but unaccountable, as through our woollyheadedness we’ve sought to designate him [...] It is to save our faces that we’ve given him a crazy reputation, a writer from whose classic accuracies we have not known how to escape (*EAP*, p. 216)
- As with all else in America, the value of Poe’s genius TO OURSELVES must be *uncovered* from our droppings, or at least uncovered from the ‘protection’ which it must have raised about itself to have survived in any form among us (*EAP*, p. 219)
- And we get for Poe a REPUTATION (*EAP*, p. 222)
- And it is precisely here that lies Hawthorne’s lack of importance to our literature when he is compared with Poe (*EAP*, p. 228)²¹

These are textual markers pointing to a listening audience which is thereby urged to identify itself with a collective agent of shared national identity. They co-operate rhetorically and, indeed, gain in relief from two noteworthy instances of the third person plural:

- Poe [...] continued to attack [...] seeking to discover [...] points of firmness by which to STAND and grasp against the slipping way they had of holding on in his locality (*EAP*, p. 219)
- The strong sense of a beginning in Poe is in *no one* else before him. What he says, being thoroughly local in origin, has some chance of being universal in application, a thing they never dared conceive (*EAP*, p. 222)

The anaphoric function of these instances of ‘they’ remains suspended as there is no strictly delineated segment to which they can unequivocally refer. Linguistics informs us that lack of explicit anaphoricity is a rhetorical device promoting textual cohesion, and aiming at garnering referential knowledge *implicit* in the reader’s

²⁰ Describing Williams’s general style in *In the American Grain*, Ned Stuckey-French stresses its ‘urgent tone, typographical emphasis, martial metaphor, and flat declarations’; ‘An Essay on Virginia’, p. 98.

²¹ The underlining which has been added to the excerpts aims at highlighting the conative agent operating in the utterances.

understanding of the realia of the text. As such, it is by no means a failure of textual communication but rather a form of strong, because tacit, solidarity established between the text and its addressee; solicited in this way, the latter reconstructs and renders the text intelligible. Loss in information-centred clarity is an inconsequential side-product of the fact that the text prioritises the communication between text and reader. An 'incomplete description', such as the above, means that 'the task of the audience is surely to fasten upon the right *object*' by completing the critic's speech act.²² As both instances are found in a section aiming at disentangling Poe's work from his contemporary milieu, it can plausibly be assumed that they connote Poe's immediate receptive context, literary/critical, against which Williams is to define his own stance. The differentiated functions of the two pronouns, 'we' and 'they' – one being of unison, the other of alienation – help to introduce a complication in the conative articulation of the essay: the invocation of an American audience becomes discriminatory as it is shown to be marked by opposition and discontinuity. There is nothing new in discursive mechanisms of solidarity-building by allusion to a camp embodying an antithetical set of values.²³ As a matter of fact, the unification of the essay's readership is achieved precisely by making it aware of an entity that falls without what is alluded to by 'us Americans'. In the final analysis, the conflictual representation introduces the thorny question of how native status is attributed. Whatever the reading response might be, the polemical connotations resounding in the use of 'them' as opposed to 'us' frame the narrative as a tale of animosity insinuated between Poe and his milieu, a tale of cultural exclusion. It seems, therefore, that the new definition of locality depends on a reanimation of a conflictual state of affairs.

²² For an account of how this type of referential use works, see Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, pp. 323-26.

²³ Michael Warner proposed an illuminating critique of mechanisms by which the mass subject is being constructed in modern times. He specifies, for instance, that '[t]he public sphere [...] presents problems of rhetorical analysis. Because the moment of special imaginary reference is always necessary, the publicity of the public sphere never reduces to information, discussion, will formation, or any of the other scenarios by which the public sphere presents itself. The mediating rhetorical dimension of a public context must be build into each individual's relation to it, as a meaningful reference point against which something could be grasped as information, discussion, will formation'; 'The Mass Public and the Mass Subject', p. 379.

But there is another element that indicates, on a different level, the importance of the pronoun value in the rhetorical articulation and signification of the essay. This involves Poe's own use of the pronoun 'we' and is found at the opening of the properly descriptive part where Williams quotes two paragraphs from Poe's article, 'Mr. Griswold and the Poets'.²⁴ In this instance, excerpts from Poe's work are mingled with the essayist's commentary, thus underlying the textual materiality of the notion of 'we'. This implies that the 'preëminent importance of the local' (*EAP*, p. 218) will be derived from Poe's own words to which Williams adds the weight of his narrative. The emphasis put on the 'flavor of provincialism', which according to the handed-down wisdom in Poe scholarship earmarks his critical dictum,²⁵ is intrinsic part of Williams' discursive manner too, but with a crucial difference: the concept is going to be re-valorised by an attempt to define 'Americanness' anew. The properly demonstrative part that is to follow is heralded as a grass-root operation; it actually stands on the *ground*, the very ground that Poe is seen to occupy. In other words, Williams will not only demonstrate his case - he will also enact it. As for the immediate impact of this isomorphic approach - in which it becomes difficult to distinguish the shape of the argument from the theme, and vice versa - this involves a transformation of 'provincialism', on which Poe's disavowal was more or less founded until then, into the very means of his rehabilitation; the essay actually turns the added value of the concept of provincality on its head, and re-directs the fortune of Poe in modern America.

²⁴ The crucial quotation by Poe is: 'That we are not a poetical people has been asserted so often and so roundly, both at home and abroad that the slander, through mere dint of repetition, has come to be received as truth. Yet nothing can be farther from it. The mistake is but a portion, or corollary, of the old dogma, that the calculating faculties are at war with the ideal; while, in fact, it may be demonstrated that the two divisions of mental power are never to be found in perfection apart. The highest order of the imaginative intellect is always preëminently mathematical; and the converse' (*EAP*, p. 218).

²⁵ Unquestionably the most powerful voice in this tradition belongs to Henry James who has asserted: 'His [Poe's] collection of critical sketches of the American writers flourishing in what M. Taine would call his *milieu* and *moment*, is very envious and interesting reading, and it has one quality which ought to keep it from ever being completely forgotten. It is probably the most complete and exquisite specimen of *provincialism* ever prepared for the edification of men. Poe's judgments are pretentious, spiteful, vulgar; but they contain a great deal of sense and discrimination as well, and here and there, sometimes at frequent intervals, we find a phrase of happy insight imbedded in a patch of the most fatuous pedantry'; *Literary Criticism. Essays on Literature, American Writers, English Writers* (New York: The Library of America, 1984), p. 367.

What is certain is that the French naming of Poe has provided the angle from which Williams carried out the ambitious plan. For to a great extent the ‘provincialism’ that has arrested Poe’s posthumous reputation in the American context was put into perspective by Baudelaire’s de facto denial of it in an emplotment which went out of its way to establish him as a universal, cosmopolitan poet – ‘une échantillon de la beauté universelle’, as he put it. The majority of the critical prose on Poe from the late nineteenth-century onwards has a distinct transatlantic focus to the point of being virtually indexed to awareness of the French stance.²⁶ On the whole, this situation entails that Poe’s canonisation via his French acceptance constitutes, by the time of the essay’s composition, the mainstream setting for any kind of discussion of Poe’s merit. With the Baudelairean project becoming a *sine qua non* condition for critical pronouncements, the issue of controversy is Poe’s alleged marginality, his constitution as a cultural ‘paradoxe apparent’ (*OEP*, p. 1051), in Baudelaire’s formulation. What the close reading of this essay will circumstantiate is that the very category of provincialism which became the bass line of Williams’s apologia, was derived from Baudelaire’s legacy with its unwavering stress on the aesthetic importance of Poe’s work. The notion of provincialism that summarises Williams’s conceptual debt to Baudelaire’s teaching is the very instrument which helped Williams to achieve his objective – namely, to render the notion positively within his idiolect as locality.

The essay indeed begins with a direct reference to the French naming of Poe; however, in lieu of a straightforward statement, we are being offered a disclaimer: ‘Poe was *not* “a fault of nature”, “a find for French eyes”, ripe but unaccountable’ (*EAP*, p. 216; emphasis added). ‘Negation is a powerful trigger of presuppositions about the possible’, stresses Jerome Bruner as he discusses, following Tzvetan Todorov, the specific means by which a narrative becomes subjunctive.²⁷ In this case, the negative form of the utterance is a semi-reference which predicates the subject-matter, Poe, on the French perception without properly referring to it by

²⁶ Thus, Poe scholarship and research has tended, in most cases, to develop in comparative literature settings, as a result of which it becomes more of a Baudelaire-cum-Poe scholarship.

²⁷ Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 30. For the notion of *subjunctivization*, a crucial principle of the fictional mode of thought as well as a discussion of its levels of actualisation, see p. 25ff.

paraphrase, gloss or other. The first implication is that, right from the start, the essay's readers are presented with a Poe who is specified negatively as 'not a find for French eyes'. Moreover, on account of their textual proximity, the clause 'a fault of nature' (the grammatical function of which is known as 'parathesis') might stand as the likely content of the type of 'find' that Poe was for the French. In a way, the narrative is taking shape by giving its subject matter a naming (French) to which - to use Todorov's own phrasing - a meaning is being added 'without this meaning becoming pure information'.²⁸ In other words, the negative mode is but a half truth, intrinsically wanting and calling for its fulfilment. Sure enough, the negative predication of Poe is readily completed by a positive one describing what Poe is in an utterance which seems to establish a self-assertive critical voice: by performing simple denominative operations - what Poe is, what Poe is not - the critic exhibits enunciative control over the 'French' voice which he first appropriates and then disavows.

However, this tidy Cartesian symmetry is somewhat complicated by syntax, in particular the clause modifying the negative utterance: 'Poe was not 'a fault of nature', 'a find for French eyes', ripe but unaccountable, *as through our woollyheadedness we've sought to designate him*' (EAP, p. 216; emphasis added). Curiously, the predicates of Poe, which have been named and discarded as intimations of the French, are - as the phrase unravels - what 'we', Americans, 'sought to designate him' 'through our woollyheadedness'. Searching for the real agent in the sentence, this seems to have splintered in two: the transference of agency from the French to the American is performed in a quasi-automatic way that does not allow for a direct causal connection, or rather separation. The grammatical modification of Poe as, presumably, a 'fault of nature' and 'ripe but unaccountable' cannot be disentangled without a great deal of speculation from the syntactically intertwined 'French' and 'American' grammatical subjects. An inquiry into the particular circumstances of this odd syntactical cooperation that resulted in the mistaken designation of Poe should point to its discursive construction and then, simply, give up. Assuming that Williams had in mind a precise idea about how this

²⁸ *Poetics of Prose*, tr. by Richard Howard (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) p. 233.

cooperation worked, there are but very few clues provided in his text: the convoluted sentence is all one is left with. There is no easy way to interpret the surface structure: the laconic conjunction 'as' which ties the sentence together has irrevocably contorted any attempt to decode the relaying of agency from the French to the Americans. In other words, a rhetorically involuted imprint is the only material sign left on the page from the interaction that presumably took place between the two national agents - admittedly, too flimsy a mark for such a rich and contested transatlantic commerce.

A working interpretation, nonetheless, could simply be that the French representation has been used by American criticism: spurred by disarray, the latter borrowed the French intimation and, as a result, deemed Poe to be 'ripe but unaccountable'. There is another significant element here in the verbal mode which uses an auxiliary, 'have sought to designate', a trigger of contingency and potentiality. The succinctly promoted connection is not presented as a factual event (evident in that the simple form of the verb, *designated*, was not used), but rather comes across as some sort of choice of the American faced with the need to categorise Poe. The nuanced reconstruction of this gesture, consisting in the selection of the French naming, should therefore indicate an act which is not random nor tied to the fluctuations of literary fashion (as intimated in the following paragraph mentioning the 'Parisian vogue' and Baudelaire's influence, prestigious by then); it is something more akin to Williams's own world-view, a tacit understanding of the merits of cosmopolitan vision. It might even be plausible to speculate that the striking enunciative economy, producing a combined critical result, is evidence of an intercultural literary construction. According to such a hypothesis, there should be no need for further elucidation if we posit a consensus - Franco-American in this case - broad enough not to have to state, or elaborate on its foundations. In the following discussion, it will become evident how Williams, after the fashion of his 'woolly-headed' compatriots, is going to use the same French kaleidoscope, although to different ends and with a good deal of sophistication.

To resume, although the programmatic sentence does its best to blur the particulars of the transatlantic workings in the perception of Poe - regardless of whether the intention is to influence or reflect a general American consensus - a

more extended commentary follows. Despite the fact that this is relatively limited in comparison to the overall length of the article, its critical reading will help to establish the intricacy of the French influence on Williams's notion of Poe. The text reads as follows:

The false emphasis [Poe's 'crazy reputation'] was helped by his Parisian vogue and tonal influence on Baudelaire, but the French mind was deeper hit than that. Poe's work strikes by its scrupulous originality, *not* 'originality' in the bastard sense, but in its legitimate sense of solidity which goes back to the ground, a conviction that he *can* judge within himself. These things the French were *ready* to perceive and quick to use to their advantage: a new point from which to readjust the trigonometric measurements of literary form. (EAP, p. 216)

Also, six pages further down, we read on the issue of Poe's transatlantic constitution:

It is natural that the French (foreigners, unacquainted with American conditions) should be attracted by the SURFACE of his genius and copy the wrong thing, (but the expressive thing), the strange, the bizarre (the recoil), without sensing the actuality, of which that is the complement, - and we get for Poe a REPUTATION for eccentric genius, maimed, the curious, the sick - at least the unexplainable crop-up, unrelated to his ground - which has become his inheritance.

(EAP, p. 222)

To paraphrase the citation is, at least initially, to separate between the merits and demerits of the legacy Williams sees in the French education of Poe, to zigzag between constitutive, interrelated elements. According to the second citation, the French saw in Poe only the surface, a word emphasised by capitalisation. After the assertion that, despite the false emphasis, the 'French mind' went deeper in its understanding of Poe, the reader is primed to expect a demonstration of what was it that these depths revealed to the French eyes. What follows is a sentence whose enunciative agent has vanished: 'Poe's work strikes by its scrupulous originality', etc. Revelation of what the surface holds hidden underneath still occurs: it actually constitutes the core of Williams' overall argument, but its main characteristic is that it is divested of an explicit subject (be that the French, the American, or Williams himself) to which this notion was disclosed. Moreover, the metaphorical energy of the vocabulary (cf. 'hit', 'strikes') points towards an active power by which the work

of Poe itself – which is the subject of the proposition – elicits its response as though no human agency is needed.²⁹ The text eventually informs us, in the following sentence, that ‘these things’³⁰ the French were ready to perceive’. However, the sentence is one step away from the actual scene where the revelation about Poe’s essence – as opposed to his surface manifestation – occurred; therefore, its delayed arrival in the narrative could serve as an argument against maintaining that it shares the same agent with it.

The narrative mechanism seems analogous to that operating in the opening sentence (‘Poe was not a ‘fault of nature’, as though we’ve sought to designate him’), in which the passage from the French to the American authoring of a mistaken perception of Poe was performed by a link that can be best characterised as the syntactic equivalent of understatement. In a similar fashion, a solid proper-name reference is made here too, leading to a value judgment whose agency is, nonetheless, hanging in the air.³¹ Despite the textual presence of two explicitly mentioned ‘claimants’, the paternity of Poe’s figuration – whether it is respectively the correct or the false one – is briefly left suspended, up for grabs. The connections, which were previously alluded to, are settled spatially on the level of the enunciative arrangement; their joining is there, on the paginational space, never verbalised in the

²⁹ Homi K. Bhabha writes about the verbal nature of the *différance* of writing: ‘The linguistic difference that informs any cultural performance is dramatized in the common semiotic account of the disjuncture between the subject of proposition (*énoncé*) and the subject of enunciation, which is not represented in the statement but which is the acknowledgment of its discursive embeddedness and address, its cultural positionality, its reference to a present time and a specific space. The act of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot ‘in itself’ be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation. The pronominal I of the proposition cannot be made to address – in its own words – the subject of enunciation, for this is not ‘personable’, but remains a spatial relation within the schemata and strategies of discourse. The meaning of the utterance is quite literally *neither the one nor the other*. This ambivalence is emphasized when we realize that there is no way that the content of the proposition will reveal the structure of its positionality; no way that context can be mimetically read off from the content’; ‘The Commitment to Theory’, p. 20.

³⁰ That is to say, the unearthed depths of Poe’s true meaning or, as the narrative will explicitly name, his locality: “‘originality’ [...] in the legitimate sense of solidity which goes back to the ground’ (*EAP*, p. 216).

strict sense of the word. Having commenced with the conjunctive clause ‘as we’ve sought to designate him’, a stubbornly unresolved mix, the American negotiation of the French idea collapses into it. The consequence of this is that the sentence where readers are finally informed of what the depths of Poe’s perception hold is extrapolated between two sentences that name the French as originators of a, still ambiguous, perception. The text’s strategy first to utter the national names and respective paradigms, then to prepare the ground for connections that are either left undone or are thinly fed by the narrative has resulted in the clearance of a space in-between: namely, the sentence with the sunken³² narrator (‘Poe’s work strikes by its scrupulous originality, *not* ‘originality’ in the bastard sense, but in its legitimate sense of solidity which goes back to the ground, a conviction that he *can* judge within himself’). The same stands for the ‘unauthorised’ sentence which was designated as the positive element of Poe’s initial predication, ‘[Poe was] a genius intimately shaped by his locality’. This is the locus where the truth about Poe is voiced by an un-proclaimed narrator, a middle ground between two clearly distinct national voices. It seems to be the case that Poe’s true importance can be stated, but only on the under-verbalised ground of his transatlantic constitution. Assuming that textual material represents an auxiliary, disposable means to arrive at, retrieve, and verbally restore meanings, these textual instances make it obvious that whatever these contents might be, they are at any rate too close to the material, verbal surface of the text to be disposable. In fact, these narrative instances exemplify Williams’s beliefs about what constitutes the task and essence of literary criticism. Its inextricable connection to its literary subject matter can, for instance, be negatively glimpsed at when Williams chastises critic Rebecca West for ignoring that ‘writing is made of words’, and for having resorted to ‘non-literary weapons’ outside of the literary sphere and ‘its modus’.³³

³¹ Similarly, the word ‘conviction’ in the clause ‘a conviction that he [Poe] *can* judge within himself’ needs a subject other than Poe, an agent enunciating such a declared conviction about Poe’s originality.

³² The qualitative words ‘sunken’ and ‘vanishing’ echo the term ‘vanishing mediator’, coined by Fredric Jameson in his study of the narrative quality of Max Weber’s *Wertfreiheit*; ‘The Vanishing Mediator: Narrative Structure in Max Weber’, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 5 (Spring 1974), 111-49 (pp. 124-27).

³³ Rosenthal, *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, pp. 383, 381. The stress on the ‘literary’, as the basic modus of not only the authorial but the critical practice too, is manifest in this

If the narrative fails to verbalise the transatlantic negotiation, neither does it explain away the inconsistency of the reference to the notion of 'surface'. The attention drawn on the word foregrounds a contradiction with the assertion of the first paragraph that 'the French mind was *deeper* hit than that [emphasis added]'. The contradiction resides in the logical incongruence between surface and depth in a single perception, especially in a judgmental context; in short, the surface to which the French were 'attracted' did not prevent them from going deeper. The essay goes on to clarify that the concept of surface indicates Poe's thematics, summed up by 'the expressive thing', which is subsequently characterized in two ways: although it is 'ripe', it is also 'the wrong thing'. Even though the notion of surface invokes a two-dimensional imagery (including, as it were, the opposition between surface and depth), it is unlikely that it has belittling connotations for Williams. It rather appears to be a crucial organisational concept having enabled him, thanks to its material fluidity, to penetrate the transatlantic barrier. Moreover, the notion seems to be instrumental for his overall plan to revisit the foundations of American culture, as the following excerpt from his foreword to *In the American Grain* shows: 'In these studies I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid' (*EAP*, 1971, p. 5).

In order to account for these apparent inconsistencies I have adopted a material approach. Delving into its possible meaning for the poet, it is necessary to recall that by referring to the French perception³⁴ the narrative clearly assumes that Poe's work has successfully in the past crossed the national borders. Having completed such a spatial itinerary, the work becomes equated to its translations, produced under specific conditions that made it available to the French general public. In this respect, the referent of discussion ceases to be a transcendental image

paragraph celebrating James Joyce's literary being, in the form of a virtually compulsive reiteration of the word 'literature': 'As literature, Joyce is going on like French painters by painting, to find some way out of this sorrow – by *literary* means. (Stay within the figure which Rebecca West cannot do). As a writer he is trying for new means. He is looking ahead to find if there be a way, a literary way (in his chosen category) to save the world – or call it (as a figure) to save the static, worn-out language'; *ibid.*, p. 382.

³⁴ Speaking, in particular, about the 'French mind', Williams reifies the French perception and thus is able to treat it independently from its possible relations with the more situated referent of 'us' Americans.

of the work – if there ever was one for Williams – and becomes instead its material manifestation, a finished product in the form of the published translations. The constraints of the inter-literary commerce entail that the receiving community is bound to get a finished product, and not the original context within which the work was produced in the first place. As such, it cannot but appear to be a surface for its target audience, a one-dimensional facet of a work detached from its native ground; the necessary migration reveals only those aspects of the work that can represent it to its receiving audience with a degree of relevance. Surface, therefore, does not imply superficiality because it is by means of its materiality that the work survives the transatlantic move – a materiality which, let it be noted, has more to do with the implicit translation activity than the essayist is ready to acknowledge.³⁵

The consequences of this are twofold: first, it is most likely that the work is perceived by its new environment to be self-sufficient, able to generate its own meaningfulness; secondly, assuming a message-receiving attitude, the agents of its acculturation are most likely to provide a context that would formulate the meaning and appropriateness of the work in question and which, to all intents and purposes, befits primarily the target- rather than the source-culture.³⁶ The two effects are intertwined. Elsewhere, Williams alluded to ‘local exigencies’ as conditioning national criticisms and determining their essentially conservative nature: ‘British

³⁵ An accurate account of similar operations is given by Lawrence Venuti: ‘Translation is often regarded with suspicion because it inevitably domesticates foreign texts, inscribing them with linguistic and cultural values that are intelligible to specific domestic constituencies. This process of inscription operates at every stage in the production, circulation, and reception of the translation. It is initiated by the very choice of a foreign text to translate, always an exclusion of other texts and literatures, which answers to particular domestic interests. It continues most forcefully in the development of a translation strategy that rewrites the foreign text in domestic dialects and discourses, always a choice of certain domestic values to the exclusion of others. And it is further complicated by the diverse forms in which the translation is published, reviewed, read, and taught, producing cultural and political effects that vary with different institutional contexts and social positions’; *The Scandals of Translation*, p. 67.

³⁶ Why this should be so is the teaching of the basic writings of polysystem theory that gave contemporary translation studies its definitive orientation (see the bibliography provided in Hermans, *Translation in Systems*, 1999; Theo Hermans, ‘Translation Studies and a New Paradigm’, in *The Manipulation of Literature. Studies in Literary Translation*, ed. By Theo Hermans (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 7-15; Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*; Itamar Even-Zohar, ‘The position of Translated Literature Within the Literary Polysystem’, *Poetics Today*, 11: 1 (Spring 1990), 45-51; Kitty M. van Leuven-Zwart and others, eds.,

criticism, like any other, is built upon the exigencies of the local literary structure and relates primarily thereto'.³⁷ Simply put, there is no easy or unproblematic access, for the target community, to the actual conditions of the work's production, nor any necessary desire to do so,³⁸ as a result of which a relevant frame of signification is activated: bearing in mind the defensive nature of the receiving culture, its wish as a national culture 'to preserve its own origins', in Williams's own words,³⁹ that frame should pertain to whatever is intelligible within its systemic limits. Crucially, this creative practice - to which Frank Kermode gave the name 'midrash'⁴⁰ - is enabled and conditioned by the posited self-sufficiency and autonomy of the received work, which is the way in which the publishing industry materialises the residual illusion of the work's wholeness. Given that the constitution of literature in modern times as an independent realm is the legacy of Enlightenment,⁴¹ it is no wonder that operations of representation of the imported work had to be kept private or even unarticulated, something that used to be poignantly true for a very long time in translation practice and criticism.⁴²

Williams's narrative seems to be implying that the French perception of Poe is no different than any other intercultural exchange, that is to say, contingent in nature and marked by the limitations of the work's transfer to another linguistic community. This is the importance of underlying that the French were after all 'foreigners, unacquainted with American conditions', 'without sensing the actuality of which that [the expressive thing] is the complement'. Linked to the systemic understanding of the inter-literary commerce, the contingent, even perhaps tangential recounting of the French perception, has thus to be articulated against the notion of a

Translation Studies: The State of the Art. Proceedings of the First James S. Holmes Symposium of Translation Studies (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991).

³⁷ *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, pp. 376, 382.

³⁸ Douglas Robinson has put it thus: 'the cultural clutter of a familiar tradition can shackle the appropriator'; *The Translator's Turn* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 179.

³⁹ *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, p. 376.

⁴⁰ By the practice of 'midrash', Frank Kermode explains, 'the interpreter, either by rewriting the story or explaining it in a more acceptable sense, bridges the gap between an original and a modern audience'; *The Genesis of Secrecy. On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. x.

⁴¹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 146.

⁴² Antoine Berman, *L'épreuve de l'étranger. Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), pp. 11-12.

wholeness with respect to the work; this is indicated both in the wording 'the surface of his genius' (*EAP*, p. 22) which hints at the potential of the 'genius' to contain the 'surface', and in the idea that the work's actuality is the 'complement' of its expressiveness. In a rough and ready paraphrase, the totality of the work consists in expressiveness added to actuality. It follows that any foreign rendering has to omit the element of (its local) actuality and keep only that of expressiveness. In this light, characterising as 'wrong' the fact that the French have 'copied' the expressive aspect of Poe's work might be a linguistic lapse, misleading readers to believe that Williams expresses a regretful view of the loss of wholeness in intercultural exchanges; the inverted commas in Williams's original indeed showcase the cautiousness with which the qualification is to be perceived.

To be specific, the essay suggests that the French were in no position to perceive Poe's locality which complements the expressive aspect of his work. And rightly so, he further suggests, as copying it would not have served their purposes, which are by definition dissimilar to the American ones: the text points out that the French 'were *ready* to perceive and quick to use to their advantage: a new point from which to readjust the trigonometric measurements of literary form'. Donald Pease points out that 'the Poe discovered by Baudelaire and Mallarmé fostered a literary tradition that has culminated in what has come to be called a post-structuralist poetics. If Poe provides a pre-existing cultural context for this poetics in America, for the French he seems less a primary text than a universally assimilated "pretext" for new departures'.⁴³ Such a striking formulation can only confirm what was argued above about the need to accompany, read and present the introduced work by resorting to a culturally adequate, relevant frame of signification. Thus, it is not that the French failed to ground Poe on locality, but rather that they have replaced his actual locality to which, as foreigners, they had no access anyway with a locality that fitted more their own needs, perceptions and aims. And even though the text is sparing in demonstrating that the denaturalisation of Poe's work⁴⁴ is by no means an

⁴³ 'Marginal Politics', p. 18-19.

⁴⁴ Even though P. M. Jones uses a slightly different discursive mode than Williams's, the core idea is very much the same in his following statement: 'To be germinative and effective, it would appear, an influence need not of necessity be based on exact, circumstantial comprehension of an original. It may proceed from a predominantly subjective apprehension, in which the original becomes more or less transformed or

idiosyncratic phenomenon but it obeys a general rule in transference processes, there can be no doubt as to the material rationale of the account. For the nature of transformations accompanying the work's transfer to another land is very much the same with the logic according to which a poet, irrespectively of the aesthetic tasks he sets for himself, belongs by definition to his native land: this is the default conceptual matrix of the essay, as we have already seen.

What is more, the depiction of the transatlantic scenery and its aesthetic transactions via localisation operations is not accidental, nor can it be attributed to an act of reification on behalf of Williams. Because, even if the unbent conditions of trans-cultural commerce render the work a surface that comes to be the exceptional means of its appreciation by its new readership, and might not do justice to its meaning, they can still bring about some potentially powerful insights. The systemic nature of trans-border literary exchanges, as described above, inevitably adds a new variety to the perceptual repertoire of a given work. In fact, in their limited, refracted vision or perhaps, one should say, thanks to it, the French were able to perceive on expressive grounds the originality of Poe. It is as if by dropping the actual from the equation that forms the work theoretically, they were permitted to appreciate its expressive beauty and significance in a somewhat augmented fashion. Referring to 'Baudelaire's important text on Edgar Poe', Julia Kristeva has accurately isolated the mechanism of his appropriation: 'the discovery or manifestation of an "abnormal" and particularly critical subjectivity was to be rejected by this American progressive, positivist nineteenth century, in full expansion'.⁴⁵ In other words, Baudelaire's project constitutes not simply another translation, soon to be outdated and become obsolete. As its reception makes evident, it becomes a new original, acquiring even some of the features of an immutable, self-contained literary work. According to Andreas Wetzel's description:

If Baudelaire [...] was not in a position to be shocked by Poe's so-called abuse of the English language, he did, in contradistinction to American readers, take his self-made poetics very seriously. [...] It is thus the explicit interrelationship between theory and practice, if not created, then at least

denaturalised in the crucible of the admirer's enthusiasm'; 'Poe, Baudelaire and Mallarmé', p. 47.

⁴⁵ 'Why the United States?', p. 279-80.

made obvious by Baudelaire, that on the one hand allowed the French reader to perceive Poe's work as an autonomous, self-contained totality, and that on the other represented a generally applicable model for subsequent authors.⁴⁶

[The same, of course, stands for the American reader of the Baudelairean text, in this case, Williams.] As a matter of fact, this situation could describe the essence of the localisation operative in any activity whereby a foreign work is imported into a different culture - a point whose importance, regrettably, has escaped T. S. Eliot's critical attention, as the next chapter will illustrate. It can therefore be argued that inter-cultural literary commerce regulates itself by turning the necessity of spatial de-contextualisation into a meaningful choice by projecting the demands of the novel reading frame on the screen of the work's significance and thereby making it acceptable in the target system.⁴⁷ Delving into the use as well as perception of foreign words in a domestic context, Theodor Adorno argues that '[t]he limited consciousness of the individual writer has little control over the extent to which this process is successful. But the process cannot be avoided: it repeats, if inadequately, the social process undergone by foreign words, and in fact by language itself, a process in which the writer can intervene to make changes only by recognizing it as an objective one'.⁴⁸

The perspective that Williams adopts belies, on the one hand, a primarily ontological view of the work and, on the other, promotes the foreign perception as a heuristic and thus invaluable viewpoint. A legitimisation of his deliberative effort of reinvention might reside in the stress on the word 'reputation', recurring in nearly all of his French references. If their refracted vision of Poe was based, as it were, on a mere surface, then a surface knowledge should be what is reflected back to European-minded American readers. The reappearance, sometimes emphasised in

⁴⁶ Wetzel, Poe/Baudelaire, pp. 65-67.

⁴⁷ This speculation about the projection of the de-contextualised work and its invented re-contextualisation lends itself comfortably to a language of orphanage and adoption. As Part I demonstrated, Baudelaire's project personified, to a large extent, the material conditions of translation by making extensive use of metaphors of familial and filial relations, brotherhood, and maternal loyalty. What happens, then, on a symbolic level is that the actuality deducted from the work's presumed wholeness becomes, in the course of appropriation, an allegory of adoption, a saga of rehabilitation.

⁴⁸ Adorno, 'Words from Abroad', in *Notes to Literature*, ed. by Rolf Tiedmann, tr. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 185-99 (p. 199).

the essay, of the words ‘reputation’ and ‘inheritance’ designating the influence of Baudelaire and the ‘Parisian vogue’ on American spiritual life marks points of concentrated narrative tension. But this tension is more evidence of a creative boost, presenting to readers not a view regretful of Poe’s recycled image, nor corrective in attitude, but rather a fortuitous opportunity to revisit familiar categories. Besides, the ‘inheritance’ referred to has already produced its narrative effects as one can discern in the following instances in which the superficiality that conditions the French figuration of Poe has left its unmistakable imprint on utterances apparently voiced by the narrator, and/or Americans themselves:

- If we have appraised him a morass of ‘lolling lilies’, *that* is surface only’
- The local causes shaping Poe’s genius were two in character: the necessity for a fresh beginning [...] and, *second* the immediate effect of the locality upon the first, upon the original thrusts; tormenting the depths into a surface of bizarre designs by which he’s known and which are *not at all* the major point in question.

(EAP, p. 219)

The first-person plural of the former citation, the metaphor of surface/depths, the dramatisation involved in the latter excerpt, the misleading anonymity of the verbal clause ‘he’s known’, and the insistence on the surface element to the point of triviality – all these characteristics point to the fact that the narrative has utterly internalised what was elsewhere attributed to the French reception. Another instance in which this operation can be observed in its mercurial, shape-shifting dynamism is found in a segment defining Poe’s language in terms of his locality: ‘It [Poe’s language] seems to fall back continuously to a bare surface exhausted by having reached no perch in tradition’ (EAP, p. 224). The reference to the ‘surface’ quality of Poe’s linguistic medium could be isolated as a quality which has thenceforth ceased being a one-dimensional principle, and becomes an intrinsic feature of an œuvre compensating for the lack of a supporting native tradition. As advanced earlier, the newness of Williams’ approach needed the intimation of such a culturally deviant idiom in order to be able to mark its terrain, and authorise itself against prescriptive ideological categories. The remark made previously about the understated manner in

which the two national perceptions come together to produce a novel, supra-national type of perception can now be seen to have developed into a situation that fully serves Williams' critical act: the polyvalencies that underpin his account, and accommodate his inventive manipulation of conventional notions have now come into plain view.

As with other narrative instances where the French and the American have surreptitiously converged to form a sufficiently shaded middle ground from which the critic is to perform his assault, this blurring of voices proves once again that there is no intention of offering a stable oppositional scheme; there is no sign of antagonistic or segregationist relation in the perspective incorporating the foreign gesture. On the contrary, there is an attempt to ensure the maximum surface of interaction. To do so, one must assume that the essayist had first to disarm potential nationalistic reflexes, which means to say that he had to minimize the artificiality of having chosen a foreign tale as the backbone of his own tale. It is a hypothesis that should account for Williams' choice to forego elucidating points of contradiction, enmeshment or conceptual hiatus regarding dualities of authorship, readership, and teaching of Poe; instead of explicitation, the hybridisation of voices is effectively realised by enunciative fuzziness.⁴⁹ Within the same view, it is also important to note that Williams omits native accounts of Poe, with the exception of a few, limited references to Poe's contemporaneous writers such as Lowell, Longfellow, and Hawthorne. The absence of Williams's own contemporaries is a striking feature of his treatise - a choice dictated for purposes of efficiency, especially given that he attempts to transform radically the usual frame of literary discussion in nation-centred terms. By actually covering up the actuality of the Poe problem in his own time, in a symbolic enactment of the French actual disregard of Poe's locale, he is able to save himself the 'cost' of taking a topical stance that would stultify his inventive re-picturing. It is, in a sense, an optimisation of the French legacy.

Williams's perspective is bifocal in outlook and nature, and requires the critic to stand on a ground which can conceivably be other than his own. The bifocal

⁴⁹ Unexpectedly illuminating appears an account of fuzziness in the domain of military interpreting that exposes its particularly logic based on 'the law of non-contradiction and the law of the "excluded middle"'; see Claudia Monacelli, and Roberto Punzo, 'Ethics in the

position can be better understood in the light of the phrase 'world panorama' that Williams used in his essay 'A Point for American Criticism',⁵⁰ in which he sought to assault an instance of exclusive English criticism as 'inadequate'. Even though refusing to assume one's own topical being might at first seem an improbable position, it is nonetheless feasible if the critic cares to acknowledge that there are two perceptions and two actualities as there can, indeed, be multiple.⁵¹ In this respect, assuming a 'world panorama' perspective requires first and foremost to grasp literary transfer, as well as its requirements and injunctions, as a system in motion. The intrinsic importance of the essay is that the 'second', invented actuality mediating the work's successful acculturation, the one entailed in the 'wrong copying' of the French, has something to teach Poe's native public, namely Williams' readers.⁵² This is precisely the lesson that the French taught Williams; their copying the 'wrong thing' invited an unauthorized version of Poe's meaning, carrying unwarranted implications for Americanist criticism on both sides of the Atlantic. The bifocal perspective he adopts when he introduces the two nationally distinct representations does not so much mean that they are two extremities of a single, meaningful *œuvre* in

Fuzzy Domain of Interpreting. A "Military" Perspective', *Translator*, 7: 2 (2001), 265-82 (p. 276 and 274).

⁵⁰ Rosenthal, *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, p. 383.

⁵¹ The world panorama position of Williams is reminiscent of F. O. Matthiessen's conviction that works of art can best be perceived if various interrelations are brought forward; he specifies that one of his main purposes was 'to make each writer cast as much light as possible on all the others'. However, these interrelations, he posits in a reificatory gesture, 'grow organically from [the] subject'; *American Renaissance. Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. xiv, xiii. Similarly, Yvor Winters, in his discussion of Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, speaks of a 'formula of alternative possibilities'. However, his analysis makes it clear that this formula is limited to the connection that needs to be made by the artist between an abstract meaning and its physical representation; see *In Defense of Reason* (The University of Denver Press, A Swallow Press Book, 1947), pp. 170-75.

⁵² Such a bifocal structuration should be read alongside Jonathan Elmer's remark about Williams's logical inconsistency when he purportedly grounds the notion of Poe's originality on its difference from a surrounding 'formless mass'. Elmer's argument goes as follows: 'To say that originality is a matter of criticism, however, the expression of a 'beginning difference' rather than some positive attribute, is to link that notion ineluctably to some antagonist [...] But it is hard to ignore a curious inconsistency in this argument for originality. For in making originality a matter of difference, Williams also logically undermines it. There is no original originality, no originality that doesn't start with difference, and yet Williams cannot quite bring himself to imagine a regime of pure differentiability'; *Reading at the Social Limit*, p. 36. It is clear that Elmer's argument

a fixed hierarchical relation to one another,⁵³ but two coherent perceptions, necessary in themselves and equally worthy of examination. The equation he brings forward is not shaped by a stable hierarchical system wherein the native automatically discredits the foreign.

Without the shadow of a doubt, Williams was able to exploit the entry point that the French surface teaching of Poe offered. How he orchestrated the convergent tale can be best illuminated if we take note of the fact that once he established the distinction between the two categories of the expressive and the actual, he proceeds to undermine it through a series of operations of conceptual transformation. As mentioned earlier, the expressive is another name for Poe's thematics, described in a wide range of characteristics from the grotesque, the arabesque, the strange, the bizarre, the curious to the eerie and, stepping up the scale of intensity, to the 'sick', the 'Macabre', the 'fault of nature'. However, and in spite of the fact that the narrative, at an early stage, has established the distinction between the two, it does not appear to concern itself further with the formal properties of Poe's work. In spite of the fact that he has, earlier on, suggested a notion of totality extrapolated by references to surface and depth, he does not reify, he does not choose to reconstitute the 'totality' of Poe's work – a gesture that shatters any belief in its transcendent identity. On the contrary, in a quirky narrative shift, his account of Poe is going to be based on the very element that the French have arguably left out of their figuration - or simply re-grounded - namely, locality. Whereas they concentrated on the expressive, Williams will completely omit it from his account, and whereas they negotiated the locality of Poe in terms of their own, embedded needs, he will establish it beyond the shadow of a doubt. As the narrative unfolds, the focus is shifted from the properties themselves towards an effort of submitting them into the matrix of Williams's aesthetics, namely, the state of cognisance with respect to the role of the native in American literature. In other words, the meaning of Poe for the American poet is not in any way explained by his thematics, but is to be actualised, to be activated in contemporary time.

presupposes a mono-national framework, and could potentially take another, entirely different, direction should it be based on a comparative setting.

Once Williams had pierced through the foreign construction of Poe as, by and large, an acculturation effect, it was possible for him to establish Poe's expressive work on the very locality contested by the French. It is hard to overemphasise the importance of this simple connection: it is the valorisation of the foreign 'error' that triggered Williams's move to look back on Poe's work from the angle of its embeddedness in culture. This he takes for granted,⁵⁴ and it can plausibly be argued that his kick-off point is self-evident by systemic necessity. Having seen the French reception as an acculturation effect, he imitates the process; he resumes a similar acculturation position but in backwards direction, pulling Poe towards his native land. However, this is not to say that he intends to establish Poe in some pre-existing framework – he rather, like the French, invents a frame that would provide an adequately signifying context.

Also, to improve the efficiency of his critique, he seeks to establish Poe as a re-imported, doubly de-contextualised figure. For, despite what some initial references to Poe's contemporaries might suggest, there is no ready-made local context besides the one that Williams himself proceeds to make up – one that is best to call 'new locality'. He asserts that 'Poe was the first to realize [...] Poe conceived the possibility, the sullen, volcanic inevitability of the *place*. [...] His greatness is in that he turned his back and faced inland, to originality [...]. And for *that* reason he is unrecognised [...]. Thus Poe must suffer by his originality [...]. This is the cause of Poe's lack of recognition' (*EAP*, pp. 225, 226). Although the mode of these utterances discourages further specifications, it is obvious that Williams refers to the general understanding of Poe by his immediate environment, which he wants us to perceive as a non-applicable signification context. This, combined with his insistence on finding 'original terms'⁵⁵ so as to build a frame of recognition both for Poe and American literature, demonstrates his desire to define Poe's actuality anew.

⁵³ This is reminiscent of Eliot's own introduction to the comparative setting of Poe's modern significance, although his principles of examination are quite different from those of Williams's, as the next chapter will show.

⁵⁴ Cf. the remarks made in the beginning of this chapter with relation to Williams's demonstration of Poe's locality on the basis of common sense.

⁵⁵ In his foreword to *In the American Grain*, the rhetoric of the new is striking: 'In these studies I have sought to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid. In letters, in journals, reports of happenings I have recognized new contours suggested by old words so that new names

The single element in the French teaching of Poe that was the most enriching for Williams's account, but which also illustrates its rhetorical connivance, is the theme of the unassimilated author. It is plainly stated by Williams that the French were capable of discerning what makes Poe singular precisely because they had dissociated him from his land; Poe's originality, the French predicate, is explicitly forwarded in the essay as a quality unconnected to the American conditions, unaccountable, betraying no sense of 'the actuality' of the culture. These formulations are summed up by Williams in a phrase squarely denying Poe's outlandishness - 'No extraordinary eccentricity of fate' (*EAP*, p. 222) – a phrase which alludes to the Baudelairean presentation of Poe as a predominantly romantic, alienated figure marked by fate. The culmination of such a description comes in physiocratic hues:⁵⁶ 'the unexplainable *crop-up*, unrelated to his *ground*' (*EAP*, p. 222; emphasis added). This type of metaphor, which draws on Emersonian rhetoric,⁵⁷ is precisely what will facilitate the ensuing reversal of terms Williams has in mind. Indicated in the veiled, playful contradiction in terms of the metaphor 'unexplainable crop-up', the physiocratic vocabulary is a bold invitation to transgression. Sure enough, Williams asserts with poise that Poe's expressive work is, in fact, a crop-up of its ground, the offspring of his locale. And this is it, really. There is no extended argumentation following the statement, nor deployment of demonstrative means – the statement simply emanates from the reversal of the French intimation. The reason why this should be so is also evident in a sentence that more or less sums the core of Williams's argumentation, and which is a curious reiteration of the French standard description: '[Poe] was the astounding, inconceivable growth of his locality' (*EAP*, p. 226). Even though the connection of artist and his land is part of Williams's programmatic statements, it still needs to be explained, or so it seems; despite the frustrating presence of the 'inconceivable', the link was declared as a self-evident truth, as we saw in the beginning of this chapter.

were constituted [...]; it has been my wish to draw from every source one thing, the strange phosphorus of the life, nameless under an old misappellation' (*EAP*, 1971, p. 5).

⁵⁶ This is a direct reference to a central metaphor that Baudelaire used to introduce the out-of-place nature of Poe's life and work: 'ces éblouissantes végétations étaient le produit d'une terre volcanisée' (*EAP*, p. 3)

A few lines further down comes an intimation that illustrates the solid and yet mercurial style⁵⁸ of Williams's prose: 'It is only that which is under your nose which seems inexplicable' (*EAP*, p. 226). The logical mechanism whereby the French argument is reversed in order to securely locate Poe has apparently the shape of a logical sophistry which does not seem likely to be resolved; it is merely contained by the essayist who plays a game of mirrors. The metaphor of mirror seems particularly adequate for a narrative that swiftly turns clear-cut denominations of a national nature around their conceptual axes to produce an unruly cascade of predications; the recounting repeatedly comes full circle to resound the French tale but never at an identical position.

This is partly the reason why Williams's account is not a corrective act of the French appropriative figuration but rather an active, under-verbalised dialogue with it resulting in something that could be regarded as its spill-over follow up. His reaction to it is evidently discriminating and interventionist, not caring to revisit the actual French texts but, instead, scanning and abbreviating them in the manner already explored, and hurrying to assess in their light the importance of Poe's critical prose. As Sollors points out, 'since it is hard to define precisely and persuasively what constitutes an adequate national or ethnic form, the point of departure is frequently in the form of a polemic against an opponent'.⁵⁹ In this respect, Williams's tale wishes to contribute to Poe's assessment by accentuating its differentiation from the French rather than the American, framework; the latter indeed recedes to a mere segment of Poe's transatlantic reception as Williams goes on to retrieve the symbolic 'noise' of the French teaching,⁶⁰ and reinforce it by giving it an American tongue so as to keep the newness of approach unspoiled, in full critical view.

⁵⁷ See Ralph Waldo Emerson's use of the images of 'root' and 'beginning' in his 'American Scholar'; *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Riverside Edition, 11 vols. (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), I, 81-115 (pp. 85-87).

⁵⁸ Ned Stuckey-French calls it 'linguistic cubism'; 'An Essay on Virginia', p. 97.

⁵⁹ Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity*, p. 238.

⁶⁰ In reaction to the 'inevitable misunderstandings' that arise as a matter of course in inter-communal communication, especially those of heterogeneous discourses, Vladimir A. Alexandrov makes the point that a common practice is 'to translate what we might consider 'noise' or 'miscommunication' into familiar terms and categories, which effectively eliminates the possibility of novelty'; see 'Lotman's "Semiosphere" and Varieties of the Self', in *Working Papers and Pre-Publications of the Centro Internazionale di Semiotica e di Linguistica*, 270 (1998), p. 13.

But there is another important element in Williams's desire to maintain the purity of perception originating in the Baudelairean approach. The typology of the unassimilated author carries evidence of a symbolic dialogue in which the exceptionalistic tradition current in America is fed on the French representation, and is subsequently enriched on the basis of their discordance. It becomes obvious that the essay intends to preserve the un-American element of the foreign figuration long enough to make it an equally obvious motor of literary invention: that is to say, to tie Poe's work to what Williams saw as the need of the American literature to establish and promote its own poetic voice. His idea of Poe's originality boils down to 'a single gesture', 'to sweep all worthless chaff aside', 'to clear the GROUND' (*EAP*, p. 216), 'to begin at the beginning' (*EAP*, p. 217), 'to BE CLEAN' (*EAP*, p. 220), 'to sweep out the unoriginal, [...] to annihilate the copied, the slavish, the FALSE literature about him' (*EAP*, p. 223). 'Beginning' is the single principle that structures, according to Williams, the whole of Poe's work and is evident, he maintains, in his material, method and diction (*EAP*, p. 230). Moreover, Poe's response to this need, namely to establish a truly American literary culture that begins at the beginning, is not, like Longfellow's, 'to bring to the locality what it lacked', 'by finding it, full blown – somewhere', 'to build an unrelated copy upon it' (*EAP*, p. 224). It is rather 'to work with a thing until it be rare' (*EAP*, p. 224-25) and by 'moving through the mass of impedimenta which is the world' 'to burst through the peculiarities of an environment' (*EAP*, p. 225), 'to originate a style that does spring from the local conditions, not of trees and mountains, but of the "soul"' (*EAP*, p. 227). All this is summarised in the formula 'the beginning difference between Poe and the rest' (*EAP*, p. 226) – a point to be tirelessly repeated throughout the essay.

A couple of additional remarks should be made about the instrumentality of the theme of cultural alienation in Williams's account. Once artistic assimilation is proclaimed to be culturally arrested, in the case of Poe, this was either branded as a regretful event, harbinger of misfortunes but also motor of discursive mobilisation (as illustrated in the Baudelairean education of Poe, and its polemical revisionism), or as a deliberate, happy instrument of renewal (as is the case with Williams). To the extent that the work has allegedly been severed from the assimilatory ties of nation-centred determinism, the critic has the opportunity to observe its distinctive features

independently, in a strikingly overdetermined fashion. Features which would otherwise be interpreted in terms of current artistic norms tend, as a result of this imagined gap of embeddedness, the work's putative rootlessness, to be perceived in terms of noise, incongruity, discordance, blemish, etc., according to the extensive repertoire of the heteroclite,⁶¹ while they are also attributable to individual idiosyncrasies and poetics rather than the discursive patterns of their time. On the whole, the new reception of the work is based on a different actuality-to-expressiveness ratio, to use Williams's terminology. And, to be sure, there is novelty to be had in this altered ratio. The unexceptional scenario provides a useful inlet into literary history, especially in the case of works which have crossed national boundaries to enter new culturescapes via various activities of appropriation, whereby they unleash a number of readings.⁶² The crux of the matter, therefore, is not so much the antithetical arguments about Poe's cultural relevance, although they can give insights into the formation of historical repertoires, but rather to realise the sheer heuristic value of the stereoscopic vision itself,⁶³ ample enough to encompass these differentiated positions - which Williams quickly grasped and explored.

In this respect, the articulation of the essay suggests a curious conceptual inter-marriage: whereas the two categories of the actual and the expressive stand initially on separate grounds, they begin to unfold in such a way that by the end of the account the expressive has been completely collapsed into the actual, and is contained by it. This is followed by a shift in values: the non-historical, abstract typology of expressive categories such as the bizarre and the grotesque is to be replaced by a revamped critical idiom, immersed in the critic's actuality. The critical preponderance of thematics is erased and replaced by an illuminative new reading

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, cited in *Practising New Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 71-74.

⁶² For particular case studies illustrating this perspective in the field of translation studies, see Pascale Casanova, particularly the chapters entitled 'Le prix de l'universel', 'Ethnocentrismes', and 'Ibsen en Angleterre et en France'; *La république mondiale des lettres*, pp. 206-26.

⁶³ Jerome Bruner was the one to state that 'as with the stereoscope, depth is better achieved by looking from two points at once'; *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, p. 10. His insight was put to good use by translator-educator Joanne Englebert who coined the term 'stereoscopic reading', although exclusively within a translational/educational context. See the relevant entry in the glossary set up by Marilyn Gaddis Rose, *Translation and Literary Criticism. Translation as Analysis* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997), p. 90.

concerning Poe's craftsmanship. The emphasis is now on the *métier* aspect of Poe's work: Williams illustrates, in a considerable number of pages, that on the level of lexis, sentence, sense, composition and logical connectivity Poe painstakingly explores the originary conditions that will enable American literature to acquire aesthetic autonomy— an issue hotly debated in modernist communities of the early twentieth century. Thus, it is the *hic et nunc* of Williams's own historical position that informs the expressive content of Poe's work – not the other way around. After having eroded the category of the expressive as a trivialised tradition, he radically actualises the concept. Through a bifocal lens, his localised critical reading bestows a fertilizing energy on the work, revealed henceforth as an instance of 'écriture' and acquiring a dazzling new content.

Given that Williams's reinvention of Poe's locality befits his situated stakes, the fact of the matter remains that the potential for renascent literary meaning does in no way constitute an escape from history. The angle of stereoscopic reading is determined by what is perceived to be the interests of the critic at the time. In this case, the name that Williams gives to the principle embodied in Poe's work is indicative of his own struggle to define the American element in modern poetry. Furthermore, his stereoscopic vision engenders another conceptual transformation. After having asserted that Poe's 'attack' on 'all worthless chaff' of his time 'was from the *center out*' (*EAP*, p. 219), he defines the gesture as 'a doctrine, anti-American'. The first utterance is an indirect reference to Baudelaire's 'excentrique destinée littéraire' (*OEP*, p. 1008). It constitutes in fact a reversal of Baudelaire's statement by situating Poe's attack at the centre and not the margins of American culture, even though it leads to the same conclusion, that is to say, that Poe's approach was anti-American. The apparent paradox of the instance, in which the initial similarity of approaches is capped by an antithetical naming, is explained if we posit a different manner of denomination. Whereas Americanness, for the French, corresponds to an abstract category whose generality can accommodate a number of topical prejudices, for Williams the name indicates a topical notion. The hypothesis could explain the general perceptual untidiness weaved in the strands of the two national representations as they are being negotiated in the essay. Different perceptions can cause the national literary system to evolve. For example, the

rhetorical advantage of Williams's lexical pool is significant in the sense that the neutrality of diction we considered earlier allows him to gain a broad audience but also provides the necessary space for fluidity and evolution. The notion of locality, for instance, enjoys a general acceptance which is analogous to its unproblematic and nondescript definition; this lack of specification becomes a narrative asset because it gives the critic the opportunity to nuance the notion according to his aesthetic idiolect. In other words, the double acceptance of the notion - common at first and, gradually, idiolectic - enables him to attract an extended audience, which witnesses the transformation of locality into the actual sphere of Williams's values. Quite in tune with the modernist pursuit for a 'new immediacy',⁶⁴ Williams secularises the contested notion of Poe's locality and by doing so he achieves two things: first, he delivers a critical pronouncement inextricable from the verballity of its subject matter;⁶⁵ secondly, he inserts in his composition the transformative power of the elapse of time by allowing the central notions that ground his representation to evolve, in narrative time, and acquire a more specific definition that comes to integrate the poet's actual present.

In the semiotic system of intercultural literary criticism, time tends to be underplayed, eclipsed by the predominance of the spatial element. The problem remains, according to Fredric Jameson, 'the apparent necessity of the mind to grasp diachrony in what are essentially synchronic or static and systematic terms. Thus, it would seem that to "understand" history involves a translation of flux or change into some relatively fixed relationship between two states or moments which are the "before" and the "after" of the historical transformation'.⁶⁶ Elsewhere, Williams has asserted that '[m]eanings are perverted by time and chance - but kept perverted by academic observance and intention'.⁶⁷ In this light, it can be argued that the main effect of his essay is to turn the perverting effect of diachrony - in the particular form of inter-border literary commerce - to his advantage by actually allowing it to

⁶⁴ The formulation is J. Hillis Miller's, cited in *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, 8: p. 159.

⁶⁵ For this point, cf. footnote 32 of this chapter. Extra-literary means carried into critical practice is, according to Williams, 'a mark of defeat', an attempt, when trying to account for the literary work, to look for 'what *cause* to blame, instead of searching in the writing, in literature, for the *reason*'. Rosenthal, *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, p. 378-79.

⁶⁶ See Fredric Jameson, 'The Vanishing Mediator', p. 127.

perform its corrosive work in the midst of his narrative. We have already seen that he does not give a prefabricated notion of locality or Americanness, but uses their common designations only to gradually modify and restructure them. In this, he also distances himself from the more conventional, static rhetoric of national criticism which conducts its conservation business by precisely masking the elapse of time and its altering effects on literary exchanges among literatures. In a seminal passage from 'A Point for American Criticism', Williams points out that:

British criticism, like any other, is built upon the exigencies of the local literary structure and relates primarily thereto. Afterward it may turn to the appraisal of heterodox and foreign works. But if these are in nature disruptive to the first, the criticism will be found to be (first) defensive, to preserve its origins. Only when an acknowledged break has been forced upon it can any criticism mend itself in a way to go up to a more commanding position.⁶⁸

This passage encapsulates a systemic theory of reception studies. Williams's differentiation consists in the fact that he has deliberately insinuated the erosive energy of a non-national, non-linear repertoire of reading into his reading of Poe, and he followed its effects to the full. These are especially visible in its nonuniform pressure exerted on basic concepts of national critical discrimination (i.e. locality, Americanness), and in the logical impurity of these notions as they relate to one another. These effects might at first seem unsystematic and, as for their particularities, they are indeed regulated by the historic placement of Williams's critical act. However, they are essential for the 'more commanding position' of modern criticism, and its desire to give a 'world panorama' because they allow the critic to situate himself in a temporal moment that imaginatively incorporates two distinct moments of literary perception. This symbolic position occupied by the critic permits him to redefine the arbitrariness of his individual position, and translate it in the more systemic terms of inter-cultural commerce.

The influence of Williams's reading of Poe was considerable as it provided the basis from which to revisit the work of Poe, and the launching pad for assaulting some of

⁶⁷ Rosenthal, *The William Carlos Williams Reader*, p. 383.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-77.

the founding notions of American literary practice. Jonathan Elmer uses the term 'realignment' to refer to the new terms of the debate, and he proceeds to implement what Williams claimed about the power of Poe's 'method', namely that it can be used to reconstruct the 'whole period, America 1840'.⁶⁹ Williams's essay inflates this specific case study so as to reach and affect the outer limits of the American canon, therefore it is of a dual valence: one bearing on Poe, the other on American literature. As the perception of Poe is based on his alleged wish to establish a beginning for American literature, the focus of Williams's discussion can be lightly shifted to promote the value of this effort as such, according to its own merits. This is where the essay's particular use for later Americanist criticism springs from. The editorial introduction to the 1995 *American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* illustrates how this thread is being picked up when it proclaims that it will try 'to use Poe as an instrument with which to explore recurring questions in American literary culture'.⁷⁰ Certainly, to do so meant that the lesson of Williams, with whom the editors share the notion 'that Poe's most extravagant literary maneuvers were usually based in the specific cultural and political climate of the antebellum America', has been perfectly assimilated. Thus, it made sense for new Americanists to 'restore his [Poe's] writings to the cultural milieu from which they appear to have been wrenched'.⁷¹

The significant detail in this tale of critical entente lies in the particular manner of Williams's critical proclamation. As shown in this chapter, he sought to embrace the French perception at first, and then amend it. He took on board the notion of Poe's originality, together with the theme of his cultural marginality from the French, to which he added his own re-appropriating reading which consisted in demonstrating that Poe was not in fact out of step with his native culture; because the American literary landscape was viewed as lacking, the tale Williams wished to advance was that of an individuality which turned its societal marginality to an inventive theoretical tool much awaited for. The incorporation of two contradicting figurations of Poe in a single reconciliatory move meant that they both became transparent, and hence accessible for American readers of Williams. His critical

⁶⁹ Elmer, *Reading at the Social Limit*, p. 37.

⁷⁰ Rosenheim and Rachman, *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe*, p. xi.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. x, and x-xi.

initiative had the effect of giving positive valence to the French naming and of making it available to the academia for further negotiation.

There is nothing surprising, then, to see that, when it was obvious that the predominantly mythical conception of American literature came to be considered by the new generation of critics as obsolete, or rather historically determined, it was possible to assert that: 'it is precisely Poe's syncopated relation to American culture, *at once both in and out of step*, that gives his writing its unique power to clarify the American tradition'⁷². The clause 'at once in and out of step' marks, *inter alia*, the normalisation of the French reading of Poe, its tacit inclusion in standard acts of criticism within American studies. Williams's emphasis on the benefits of a bi-focal approach can be seen in his essay on Poe. One can argue that in the same manner in which the editors of this volume state that '[i]nstead of continuing to see Poe's contradictions as a problem, we can now face up to their constitutive role within his oeuvre', the transatlantic divergence is perceived, for the first time from Williams onwards, not as a tug-of-war between the European and the American understandings but rather as an invitation to build bridges.

⁷² Ibid., p. xii; emphasis added. A similar, double, formulation is found on p. xviii: 'Poe can be seen most clearly stepping in and out of the main currents of American thought', a concept also reiterated at the closing of the introduction, p. xx.

Chapter 2. T. S. Eliot's fantasy of Poe

In 1948, Eliot delivered a lecture entitled 'From Poe to Valéry' at the Library of Congress, in Washington.¹ It was the same year that he received the Nobel Prize of Literature as well as the year that, for some commentators, marks the beginning of a new era of European relations, the Cold War.² In this lecture he sought to describe his appreciation of Poe through the prism of three French poets, namely, Baudelaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Paul Valéry. This essay will be the focus of the present chapter because it treats its subject matter in an exhaustive manner. However, Eliot expressed his ideas about Poe's transatlantic reputation in a number of critical pieces. Thus, this particular viewpoint is to be iterated in a lecture Eliot gave, five years later, in 1953, at Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, entitled 'American Literature and the American Language'.³ He was concerned with identifying American literature by means of examining the transatlantic reputations of three authors who stood, as he put it, 'as solitary international figures', namely Poe, Whitman and Twain. Even though Poe represents one of the authors discussed in the essay with the aim to disentangle a more general definition of American literature in its contrapuntal position to British literature, it is handled in the same terms as in the 1948 text. These two lectures appear to continue Eliot's interest in Poe, first expressed in a text he broadcasted during the Second World War, "'A Dream Within a Dream.'" T. S. Eliot on Edgar Allan Poe'.⁴ The brief speech examines Poe's influence, his 'historical importance', and assesses the effect of his poems through his poetics. But Eliot's attraction to the issue of Poe's significance is even older: it was expressed for the first time in a brief note published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, in November 1926.⁵ His 'Note' is in effect a brief commentary on what constitutes the metaphysical poet, two exemplars of which are Mallarmé and Poe; its different perspective notwithstanding, the text provides a significant nuance to the

¹ *To Criticize the Critic, and Other Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 27-42. Further page references will be given in the body of the text.

² Jean-Jacques Roche, *Le système international contemporain* (Paris: Montchrestien, 1994), p. 19.

³ Eliot, *To Criticize the Critic*, pp. 43-60; hereafter referred to in the body of the text as *AL*, with page numbers in parentheses.

⁴ *The Listener*, Thursday 25 February 1943, pp. 243-44.

rationale of the other essays. The aim of this chapter is to extract, from a total of four essays spanning a twenty-five-years period, the rhetorical composition of the figure of Poe, with an eye for Eliot's transatlantic tenets. These will become clear as they will be set against the different contextual frame provided by William Carlos Williams, one of Eliot's modernist interlocutors. Such a course of analysis will illustrate that the charting of Poe's critical education in twentieth century America passed through a process of institutional consecration, voiced by Eliot, who reconstructed the two cross-Atlantic poles of Poe's reception as complementary vignettes of an indivisible, transcendental essence.

Eliot qualifies his essay on Poe as a 'study of his influence', of 'Poe's effect upon three French poets', thus making it clear that the prism he has chosen is 'through the eyes of three French poets, Baudelaire, Mallarmé and especially Paul Valéry' (p. 28) – that is to say, receptional. This choice is spelled out negatively too, in the following disclaimers: 'My subject, then, is not simply Poe' (p. 28), and, in the opening sentence of the essay, '[w]hat I attempt here is not a judicial estimate of Edgar Allan Poe; I am not trying to decide his rank as a poet or to isolate his essential originality' (p. 27). His critical interest in Poe is framed in a similar manner in the 1943 speech: 'I started with the intention of speaking only of Poe's writings, but I found it necessary to say something of his prose also', which is inseparable from 'Poe's reputation' ('Eliot on Poe', p. 243), as the text goes on to clarify. The intention of the essayist, on three different occasions, all of which public, could have hardly been stated in a more lucid manner, and yet both aspects of his goal - that is to say, the bi-focal perspective and the refutation of judgmental criticism – are going to be belied in the course of his exposition.

Evidently, a bifocal approach works in two stages that it would make good sense to keep separate for a brief moment: the first one is for the critic to acknowledge and describe the recorded divergence in Poe's perception; the second is to attempt to interpret the reception vagaries. The first, mainly descriptive, is more likely to lend itself to structurally-driven reactions, like Williams's approach. The second one is usually marred by a hastiness to embrace interpretative authority and, in fact, resembles much of the mainstream translation discourse that preceded

⁵ 'Note sur Mallarmé et Poe', tr. by Ramon Fernandez [n.v.] (Novembre 1926), 524-26.

polysystem theory.⁶ My contention is that the two options, both made available in the comparative perspective, are intrinsically discrepant in nature, ideological premises and implications. What is more, the second option, as it tends to privilege emplotment over description, virtually undermines the potential of discovery inherent in bi-focalism. As the individual trans-cultural manifestations of the work under study do not seem to be necessary in themselves (for the forms of aberration, misunderstanding, overestimation, etc. they may take introduce heterogeneity at the heart of mono-cultural literary discourse), the interpretative impulse is to assume a mono-cultural vision and re-install the source-text as a transcendental unity. To put this differently, comparativism is a critical instrument that can be put in various and conflictual uses as its peculiar, decontextualised logic compels the comparatist either to foreground his/her own personal stance as an observer, or to deny it altogether.⁷ With this in mind, I will be arguing that Eliot's important comparative initiative stands as an exciting but unfinished project, a critical praxis that has failed to fully respond to the systemic perspective disclosed by Williams. Right from the start, the differentiated reputation of Poe in two national environments appeared to Eliot striking enough to provide him with a stark comparative context; however, this was not a reality to be described, but rather a problem to be solved, a puzzling situation that required the observer to explain it away. The aim of this chapter is to substantiate that the effect of Eliot's approach is paralysing as the task is rendered impossible by the very principles of his aesthetics.

Looking closer, the type of approach Eliot chose, that of a bi-prismatic, inter-cultural reception, seems to foreground what he calls an 'enigma' (p. 28). The qualification of Poe's case as an enigma is reiterated in his essay 'American Literature and the American Language', where we read that 'Poe remains an enigma' (p. 55). Both essays illustrate the characterisation in virtually identical terms: 'What is remarkable about the posthumous history of Poe is the fact that his influence in

⁶ Valid until the late seventies, this was by and large source-oriented and tended to account for various types of translational reception in highly prescriptive and judgmental terms. For a concise introduction to a long and winding historical process, see Hermans, *Translation in Systems*, esp. chapters 2, and 3.

⁷ For a discussion of a particular historical instance of this 'denial of coevalness' (a term she borrows from Johannes Fabian), see Mary Louise Pratt, 'Scratches on the Face of the

France, on and through the intermediary of the three great French poets, has been immense; and that his influence in America and in England has been negligible' (*AL*, p. 53); and, also, '[i]n France the influence of his poetry and of his poetic theories has been immense. In England and America it seems almost negligible' (p. 27). 'Immense' in the French case, 'negligible' in the Anglophone case – Poe's transatlantic reception could not possibly be summarized in a starker way. The discreet marking of the binarism is evident, too, in the juxtaposition of 'underrated' and 'overrated' – two qualifications Eliot used to designate the domestic and the foreign responses in the 1943 and the 1948 texts respectively; clearly, these indexes show how unchanged Eliot's thinking about the issue was.

The stark opposition in the perception of Poe by the two different national establishments, the American and the French, is commonly acknowledged in the early thirties and forties.⁸ When Eliot formulates the dual reception as a logical conundrum, he provides a compelling summary that pre-empts any possible challenge on the level of empirical evidence. Essentially, this functions as a narrative with a gripping force (*enigma* being a trope which induces a specific interpretative impulse in its readers, namely mystery-solving), which has already arranged the raw material of Poe's case, and the conditions by which to explore it critically. This, the essay asseverates, needs to be studied, first and foremost, as an enigma. The fact remains, however, that its enigmatic nature does not necessarily follow, not, that is, if each national reception is taken on its own merit, as dictated by the particular literary and cultural frame within which it has been formed; that account would put the different perceptive frames one alongside the other. In this case – a case effectively taken up by Williams – one may speak not of enigma, but rather of plurality, variability, or any other term defining temporal shifts in literary interpretation. In contrast, if one presupposes that there can be but one valid assessment – as this seems to be the case with Eliot despite his disclaimers – the differentiated perceptions are

Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen', *Critical Inquiry*, 12: 1 (1985), 119-43.

⁸ Poe's work is commonly designated in that period through the transatlantic divergence; among the critics of the period, George Orwell, to name one improbable case, used the example to define Jack London in his serial radio broadcasts: 'Jack London, like Edgar Allan Poe, is one of those writers who have a bigger reputation outside the English speaking world

instantly arranged in hierarchical order, and their relation to one another is regulated following a critical process similar to detective inquiry. As we saw, readers are put in the impelling position of a Dupin, driven by a mystery to be solved; offered a bird's eye view, they are led to think of the two perceptions as springing from a unique source. According to this stance, each of them is essentially geared in a position of permanent structural insufficiency as if neither came about for reasons that were conditioned by its own cultural imperatives. The fact that Eliot renounced any evaluative intention has rendered the whole account of the tendentious symbiosis a delicate task for the acknowledged disparate positions are not to be judged nor to lead into an exploration of their individual cultural constraints – which are the two logical alternatives of the situation. The challenge he is faced with is embodied in a comparative reconstruction in which these reputations will be presented as mutually dependent whilst their status and utility will be accordingly determined by what each can offer, not to their individual cultural sites, but to the other.

Partly by reasons of internal necessity, the emphasis of the essay on the inter- or bi-cultural entails a refusal to be judgmental. In a similar situation where the perception of an author appears to be so starkly divergent, a vision incorporating them goes against the very nature of evaluative/prescriptive attitude. If the critic's intention, in other words, were to pronounce a judgment on Poe, it would be much easier for him to restrict to one of the two receptive frames - the French case for appraisal, the Anglophone case for disavowal. It is undoubtedly true that for Eliot judgmental criticism lies in a strictly national frame, made available in the existing critical repertoires. At the same time, though, when he invokes these judgmental national frames in order, as he suggests, to move to another plane, he is effectively providing judgments of Poe; in confirmation of this, these recurrences are unnervingly consistent in the essay. It could, therefore, be maintained that Eliot's overarching decision to overstep judgmental criticism has already included it. If only to a certain extent, Eliot's comparativism carries within it a flammable material, that is to say, awareness of what it wishes to transcend. Moreover, the fact that the critic had to reiterate his comparative intention in the form of the judgmental disclaimer,

than inside it'; see *Orwell: The War Broadcasts*, ed. by W. J. West (London: Duckworth/British Broadcasting Corporation, 1985), p. 122.

speaks of the uneasiness of the cohabitation. It seems, therefore, that the approach he has chosen is more of a test for a primal evaluative instinct, bound to result either in complete annihilation or, conversely, plain reinstatement. By the end of the present chapter it will become evident what position comparativism will ultimately come to occupy within the ideological frame of Eliot's critical praxis.

Instead of an evaluation of Poe, Eliot makes what appears to be an attempt at description: he first represents the 'native' or Anglo-centred perception of Poe before proceeding to do the same with the French perception. Thus, the domestic leads and the foreign follows - a layout very clearly demarcated in the essay's structure, drawing on what should be a natural, after all, pacing of events imitating their chronological sequence. However, the manner in which Eliot justifies that his own, or Anglophone, impression, needs to precede the French might indicate something different than a simply linear, temporal depiction: 'I think it as well to present my own impression of his status among American and English readers and critics; for, if I am wrong, you may have to criticize what I say of his influence in France with my errors in mind' (p. 29). The positioning of the words *wrong*, and *errors* suggests that the foreign perception has already affected the domestic one. Its historical precedence in relation to the foreign perception, which is presumably unproblematic, is somewhat destabilised as a potentially erroneous one. The foreign perception becomes, at this point, prematurely manifest, not a mere historical aftermath of the domestic one; it has already acquired, in the self-conscious narrative voice, an ontological status of sorts as it retrospectively acts upon the preceding, domestic perception, and re-organises it in a genetically impossible, and yet compelling way. An important element of essayistic organisation is being announced here: it is the supremacy of the intellect over historical criticism.

Awareness of the French perception of Poe, therefore, has already produced its marks on Eliot's consciousness, thus altering the cultural clarity or necessity of his subjective impression of Poe. Thus, what could have been a factual outline of two historical moments in Poe's transatlantic reception, isolated dots on the long line of his 'history,' has instead become a subjective representation which has internalised

its opposite as a sign of ontological erroneousness.⁹ Even at this preliminary level, then, comparative statements are mitigated by the presence of their opposite. In the same vein, Eliot squarely confirms that if English criticism sought to assert Poe's artistic faults – a likely summary of his Anglophone reception, indeed - '[t]his,' he tells us, 'would not be *just*' (p. 27; emphasis added). Additionally, the following assertion makes a seemingly straightforward counter-distinction of the two national understandings in highly evaluative terms; at the same time, though, it shows that the observer turns the inquisitive thrust towards his own consciousness (rhetorically enlarged to include the Nation): 'Now, we all of us like to believe that we understand our own poets *better* than any foreigner can do; but I think we should be prepared to entertain the possibility that these Frenchmen have seen something in Poe that English-speaking readers *have missed*' (p. 28; emphasis added). The last two instances are textual traces of a conscience which seems, to a modern reader, to have internalised guilt in the face of contention.

The descriptive use of a psychology-laden vocabulary (i.e. guilt, awareness, internalisation) has the specific purpose of singling out one function, or mode of comparativism which is essential to its cognitive charting, namely spatiality. Eliot's formulation of the transatlantic figuration of Poe around the notion of enigma can be seen to induce a certain anxiety in himself as well as in his readers, suggested in the evaluative, quasi-moral terms he uses to describe it. What triggers anxiety is the closing of distance, an abstract force that has allowed him to bring together the two national perceptions in a single, enigmatic account. Depicted as acting not separately anymore within their respective frames but in concert, these perceptions may bring about a novel and urgent signification of the work of Poe, which should erode the stability of a self-centred, unilateral consciousness. Gregory Bateson has shown, in his aetiology of schizophrenia, the crucial role of fluctuations in closeness and distance in the development of anxiety in familial double-bind situations.¹⁰ This

⁹ Famously, Floyd Stovall, in his categorisation of different brands of Poe's reception included a category of 'those who do not like Poe but feel as if they ought to because certain French writers and critics whom they admired have praised him'; see *Edgar Poe the Poet*, p. 183.

¹⁰ 'Towards a Theory of Schizophrenia', in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology*, ed. by Gregory Bateson (London: Paladin, Granada Publishing, 1978), p. 185.

tangential elucidation becomes even more central and relevant in Edward Said's polemical examination of anthropology as an imperial/colonial arena; among the central concerns of a revised field - the others being the 'constitutive role of the observer', and 'intellectual dissemination' - Said cites 'geographical disposition'. This involves 'the ways in which proximity and distance produce a dynamic of conquest and transformation that intrudes on cloistral depictions of the relationship between self and the other'.¹¹ Thus, anthropological as well as comparative discourses are ideally placed to promote the urgency of such an exploration which will eventually give prominence to the 'constitutive role of the observer'.¹² Given that there is no vantage point outside the concrete contexts which have produced a certain figuration of the author, always responsively, it is inevitable that the stress will have to fall on the critic's own historical position - as Williams duly realised in his re-figuration of Poe. But Eliot's account, having different ideological stakes, had to organise itself around the pivot of mystery, thus further rearranging the spatial tightening into a narration that ultimately invites a confirmation of the Anglo-American primacy.

What is also indicated in these passages is that Eliot's critical vision encompassing both perceptions seeks not simply to demarcate them, but rather to integrate them in a joint understanding of the work, to use them as points of reference in pursuit of its fleeting essence, which ideally needs to be pinned down. Each one, in turn, helps to elucidate, or correct the other as the narrative unfolds: by employing terms that affect, belie, or undermine their respective justness, the essay treats them as complementary entities, both holding fragments of truth. However, it needs to be stressed that their oppositional designation does not mean to say that one annuls the other; on the contrary, Eliot requires both bits to remain intact and to occupy the two opposite extremes of the bi-focal line. Crucially, his corrective attitude embraces both perceptions on the basis of their intrinsic deficiency, suggested and guaranteed by the assumption of an unchanging, unquestioned

¹¹ Edward W. Said, 'Representing the Colonized', pp. 205-25 pp. 217-18. A lengthier passage from Said's article is useful here: 'it is the case, I believe, that we would not have had empire itself, as well as many forms of historiography, anthropology, sociology, and modern legal structures, without important philosophical and imaginative processes at work in the production as well as the acquisition, subordination, and settlement of space' (p. 218).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 217, 212.

invariant. Most importantly, their historical, cultural *hic et nunc* is seen to gradually fade away into the enlightened consciousness of the critic as their respective domains of influence are artificially extended both retrospectively (in the case of a possibly 'wrong' native perception), and anaphorically (in the case of the foreign perception which is eventually to be disenfranchised by the linguistic validity of the domestic). As pointed out above, a process of transformation of the historical into the abstract has just begun, and it will be explicitly formulated presently.

Despite the self-questioning that the foreign reception has triggered, the critic, who speaks on behalf of the domestic receiving community, assumes the comparative outlook with a view to giving an interpretative account of the divergent picture thus disclosed. Having first insistently described the enigmatic figure of Poe that has sallied forth, he goes on to paraphrase this imagined picture of abutment in the following manner:

What strikes me first, as a general difference between the way in which the French poets whom I have cited took Poe, and the way of American and English critics of equivalent authority, is the attitude of the former towards Poe's *œuvre*, towards his work as a whole. Anglo-Saxon critics are, I think, more inclined to make separate judgments of the different parts of an author's work. [...] These French readers were impressed by the variety of form of expression, because they found, or thought they found, an essential unity; [...] they [...] take him as an author of such seriousness that his work must be grasped as a whole.

(p. 31)

To understand the meaning of such a depiction of the transatlantic discrepancy, it is useful to recall a strikingly similar instance, near the opening of the essay, which explains why Poe is asserted as 'indeed a stumbling block for the judicial critic':

If we examine his work in detail, we seem to find in it nothing but slipshod writing, puerile thinking unsupported by wide reading or profound scholarship, haphazard experiments in various types of writing, chiefly under pressure of financial need, without perfection in any detail. [...]. But if, instead of regarding his work analytically, we take a distant view of it as a whole, we see a mass of unique shape and impressive size to which the eye constantly returns.

(p. 27; emphasis added)

Eliot seems to be saying that a choice between looking at the work as a whole and looking at it in detail might be responsible for the two intrinsically different approaches to Poe. Then he accounts for the transatlantic difference in the exact same terms. Citing together the two passages, separated by a good four pages, should make it obvious that when one representation is projected onto the other it matches it perfectly: the French took Poe's work to be a wholeness whereas the Anglo-Americans considered it only in fragments. The two national perceptions are being reduced, in other words, to a difference in approach. Furthermore, this abstracted representation is anthropocentric in nature, something that Eliot makes explicit by saying that '[t]his represents partly a difference between two kinds of critical mind' (p. 31). This is an impressive moment of the composition which assertively compresses a long history of different readings of Poe, within both literary systems in a single theoretical reflection acknowledging, in turn, the whole and the part. Eliot's overarching manipulation is seen in action here as it manages to concentrate this long-span history by eradicating, say, periods of silence marking it, or moments of reception which are resistant to systemisation;¹³ the 'bi-focal' material needs, for purposes of idealisation,¹⁴ to be as streamlined and seamless as possible.

There are some rich implications here which need to be closely inspected. The most visible and important one is the translation of the transatlantic commerce – concrete, borne out of particular conditions and circumstances – into an abstract concept. As shown above, this transmutation has already been announced in the fraught presentation of the domestic reception as a possibly erroneous one, possibly 'missing' something that the French have efficiently spotted in Poe's work. From the initial pseudo-factual observation of two opponent receptions, misleadingly promising a material reconstruction, we are now being ushered into a different setting. The announced 'study of influence' has surreptitiously transmogrified into

¹³ This critical tendency, in Poe scholarship, to emphasise a conciliatory, melting-pot notion of reception which was enabled, in the first place, by omitting instances of discordance, divergence, or indifference, is illustrated in a recent itemisation attempted in *Poe Abroad. Influence, Reputation, Affinities*, ed. by Lois Davis Vines (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Janet Sorensen stresses the danger of homogenisation lurking in any attempt to challenge hegemonic scenarios that fails to question 'distinct hierarchies of [...] social structure' within the interior of the juxtaposed, striated cultures, whether colonial or colonised; *The Grammar*

the exploration of a 'critical mind' with no specific predicates: the latter is quasi-omnipotent in that it is able to choose freely to see Poe's work either as a whole, or analytically, in disconnected parts. Two distinct configurations have collapsed into a single, unified construction, summarized by Eliot's reference to a space-transcending 'type of mind'. The two options which, in actual fact, were made historically available in given cultural sites are now relegated to the a-historical locus of the critic's mind. Not only their cultural embeddedness is suspended but, also, their conflicting implications as to the meaning of the work are also exorcised as they are carefully integrated into the critic's self-centred and self-regulated consciousness.

The instability of Poe's significance that burst forth as a direct result of these differentiations must have been a distressing fact for Eliot. This is also illustrated in the fact that having chosen, in 'American Literature and the American Language', to concentrate on Poe, Whitman, and Twain on the basis of their high 'reputation abroad' resulted in a stated inability to define American literature.¹⁵ Thus, according to the stance of Eliot in these texts, reputation abroad affects directly the posited authority of concentric literary criticism. Bearing in mind this, as well as the distress caused by transatlantic proximity, one can apprehend the particularity of Eliot's criticism. His intervention shows a way out of the instability inflicted on the domestic by the foreign by absorbing the latter in the ordinary business of the critic who assumes two modes of critical attitude, and moves at will from the partial to the whole. The bi-focal tool that has sown agitation can, if thus manipulated, restore order. Eliot is all too aware that the comparative schema he is exploring does not disclose a mere, even accidental, literary event, but represents a potentially serious impeachment on the 'whole existing order' of the literary canon. The rational structure of his essay, carefully demarcating the two national repertoires, exemplifies that for Eliot, as John Guillory aptly put it, '[t]he horizon of the problem for which

of Empire in Eighteen Century British Writing (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 17-18.

¹⁵ This is made clear in at least two occasions: first concerning the authors' Americanness: 'What their common American characteristics may be, is something I should consider it folly to attempt to define' (*AL*, p. 53); and secondly, concerning the overall characterisation of the American literature, as the focus of his lecture: 'When, however, I assert that the term "American literature" has for me a clear and distinct meaning, I do not believe that this meaning is wholly definable; and I shall try to explain in what respect I think it is undesirable to try to define it' (*AL*, p. 51).

the figure of the minor poet provided a historical solution was never less than culture in general';¹⁶ hence, the 'overinvestment in the concept of "order"' which 'virtually defines the historical presuppositions of Eliot's criticism.'¹⁷ Even the position of the passage where the two different speculative modes are named can be said to serve the implied rationale in that it not only leads but it also structures the order in which the variegated historical repertoires are to be perceived: it is situated at two controlling paginational positions, first at the beginning of the essay announcing the topic, and immediately before the account of the domestic perception. In this respect, it might be seen as a preliminary instruction on behalf of the comparatist, indicating his willingness to dispense with conflicting elements, to symbolically settle the matter even before its terms and parameters are laid out.

Concurrently, there is a significant shift in how the two quoted passages, juxtaposed on the basis of their analogy, define their respective subject positions. Whereas in the first one the actors are 'American and English', or 'Anglo-Saxon critics' on the one hand and 'French readers' on the other, in the second passage the agent is designated by the pronoun *we*. The evasion of the historical which was identified in Eliot's move to integrate the two perceptions in an ideal single understanding is also exemplified in the passage from the national names to an all-encompassing, conciliatory *we*. This might either represent readers and critics alike without further specification, or it can summon those belonging to the same linguistic community as Eliot. It can even be argued that, in its ambivalence, the pronoun *we* has ideally absorbed the national naming in its process of becoming the universal critical mind, endowed with the empowering ability to integrate even what, linguistically speaking, is not its own. Such a move allows the critic to set off for a cosmopolitan exercise even though he speaks in the name of national concerns. Thus, two different things are achieved at the same time: the narrative alludes to, and quickens a national identification while maintaining the veneer of the unspecified, disembodied critic. Clearly, this represents a fantasy in which the critic stands above languages and cultures whilst his 'identitarian thought'¹⁸ is veiled behind a handling

¹⁶ *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 151.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 143, and 144.

¹⁸ The expression comes from Said's, 'Representing the Colonized', p. 225.

of them seemingly on a par. The rhetorical development allows, at times, to just discern the thin ice on which Eliot has to tread on as the comparative medium compels him to offer both disavowal and valorisation of a specific 'field of opinion', and to openly discuss what he needs to repress.

The peculiar economy achieved by different enunciative ways which translate the transatlantic into the cognitive is equally revealing. It can be assumed that Eliot's formulation, 'this represents a difference between two kinds of critical mind', presupposes identity, an invariant that insures their ultimate unification. Alluding to a mind's potentiality to discern forms of discrepancy requires the existence of a stable element that enables switching from one form to the other without affecting the structure of thought itself. In an essay entitled 'A Note on American Literature', where Eliot discusses the American critics Paul More and Irving Babbitt in comparison to the French Sainte-Beuve, he makes evident the connection of community and contrast for achieving critical unity; he writes:

But having dealt with three English writers of what may be called critical prose, one's *mind* becomes conscious of the fact that they have something in common, and, trying to perceive more clearly what this community is, and suspecting that it is a national quality, one is impelled to mediate upon the strongest *contrast* possible. Hence these comments [...] which would not take exactly this form without the *contrast* at which I have hinted [emphasis added].¹⁹

In 'American literature and the American language', Eliot explicitly mentions identity as the element which underlies the legitimacy of a foreign perception seen from the native viewpoint:

The foreigner may at first be attracted by the differences: an author is found interesting because he is so unlike anything in the foreigner's own literature. But a vogue due to novel differences will soon fade out; it will not survive unless the foreign reader recognizes, perhaps unconsciously, identity as well as difference.

(*AL*, p. 55)

¹⁹ *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1928), p. 38.

Thus, when observing foreign perceptions, Eliot seems to notice what is glaringly not there at all, that is to say, identity. The quasi-automatic connection is reminiscent of a hypothesis that Perry Anderson advances about the idealistic formation of English criticism in response to what he calls 'the objective vacuum at the centre of the culture'.²⁰ An example Eliot uses suggests what the content of identity might be: 'When we read a novel of Dostoevski, or see a play by Tchekhov, for the first time, I think that we are fascinated by the odd way in which Russians behave; later, we come to recognize that theirs is merely an odd way of expressing *thoughts and feelings which we all share*' (*AL*, pp. 55-56; emphasis added). It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that Eliot's exposition is informed by the 'Enlightenment humanitarian ideals of universality, sameness and equality'.²¹ If, to revert one of his expressions, the foreign perception is to be taken seriously (by the native, surely), then it needs to be seen as having incorporated identity.

The central role of identity can safely be posited against the belittling designations of difference: not only do the Russians have 'odd ways' to express thoughts and feelings, but their fictional characters also 'behave' in 'odd ways.' What is more, as Eliot saw it, '[I]t is possible for foreigners to be *mistaken* about contemporary writers: I know that the contemporary English estimate of the importance of some French writer, or the contemporary French estimate of the importance of some English writer, can be *grotesque*' (*AL*, p. 55; emphasis added). All this suggests that difference in aesthetic perceptions is not necessarily indicative of aesthetic value, and difference is, after all, the produce of all inter-linguistic transfers with no exception. For all Eliot knows, it might be a matter of 'vogue', and 'a vogue due to novel differences',²² he hurriedly foresees, 'will fade out'. On the

²⁰ Building his argument on the basis of Leavis's work, he argues that 'English criticism, with Leavis, assumed the responsibility of moral judgment and metaphysical assertion' grounded on the principle of the 'organic continuity of the past'; see his article 'Components of the National Culture', *New Left Review*, 50 (July-August 1968), 3-56 (p. 50 and 53). A summary of Anderson's hypothesis of the cultural void is found on pp. 56-57.

²¹ See Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 8.

²² The stress on 'novel' in this clause - which brings to mind Williams's allusion to the 'Parisian vogue' - refers undoubtedly to the extension of a work's afterlife in its simple removal from, and re-settlement in a different linguistic environment; at this point, it needs to be stressed that the work's differential quality becomes, in foreign reception, the object of further renovation and renewal.

basis of this evidence, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesise an ingrained suspiciousness in the face of all inter-linguistic influences as they inevitably valorise difference per se. What is important for Eliot is that, for difference to acquire value, difference itself needs to be transcended, erased in the form of identity dormant therein. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' Eliot argues that tradition:

cannot be inherited [...]. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.²³

The humanist dream of tracing identity in difference, a distinctly Baconian idea, resonates in these concerns which clearly distinguish Eliot from a series of thinkers who were able to valorise heterogeneous re-inscriptions of a work 'after its time and outside its original environment'.²⁴ Actually, Eliot hurriedly suspends the discreet character of these overdetermined readings by identifying shared ideas in them, instead of acknowledging the necessity of what Robert Escarpit called 'creative treason,' indicating, in the same wavelength as Walter Benjamin, that 'the betrayal gives [the author] or rather his work a new lease of life'.²⁵

A concrete manifestation of identity in non-domestic perception is its persistence in time, its 'survival' – a point duly emphasised in the lengthy description of Poe's European influence spanning 'three literary generations, representing almost exactly a century of French poetry' (p. 28). The importance of time is also evident when Eliot explains the difficulty of trying 'to estimate his [Poe's] degree of *permanent* greatness apart from his great influence' ('Eliot on Poe', p. 243; emphasis added). Permanence, or persistence in time of a work is what guarantees literary value, seems to be the argument of this description. However, even though Eliot

²³ *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Vincent B. Leitch (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 1092-98 (p. 1093).

²⁴ Robert Escarpit, "'Creative Treason' as a Key to Literature", *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 10 (1961), 16-21 (p. 18).

acknowledges inter-cultural difference on the grounds of its persistence in time, as the French case doubtless is, that is nonetheless not a clear sign of identitarian transparency. The flagrant exhibition of difference in his account should deeply unsettle the pursuit of identity by its sheer weight of excess. Given especially the rational tone of the composition, one cannot help stumbling on the marked way in which the inter-cultural receptions are diametrically opposed to one another. The excess of difference is bound to expose Eliot's pursuit of identity in Poe's work; the effects of such a poignant representation converge into a sense of disquiet in the face of persistent variation,²⁶ an acute awareness of the corrosive exposure of the work to different spatial and temporal frames.²⁷ Bearing in mind the anxiety-inducing function of the enigma trope, one has to posit, by force of imagination, identity as the only principle which can alleviate the malaise of providing such a study of influence. At one point in 'American literature and the American Language', the malaise becomes a paradox: therein, Eliot wishes to emphasize that he is 'not concerned, in making such a selection [of Poe, Whitman, and Twain, three authors of the highest reputation abroad], with questions of influence' (*AL*, p. 53). This apparent antinomy shows the extent to which Eliot feels constrained to deal with the consequences of literary transfer, largely internalised via his modernistic involvement as well as his general aesthetics. In this instance, the bi-focal prism seems more of a burden than a prospect of illumination, a self-inflicted imposition which seems bound to lead to internal, insoluble contradictions as Eliot tries to keep influence both in and out of its

²⁵ Ibid., p. 20. For Benjamin's approach to the notion of afterlife, see his 'Task of the Translator', pp. 71-82.

²⁶ This perceptible effect of disquiet and distrust reminds one of the eighteenth century efforts at defending a universal grammar. The phenomenon is described, in its concatenation, by James Paxman: 'As [...] explorers, missionaries, and travellers expanded knowledge of the world's languages faster than ever before, language philosophers faced the need to integrate within speculative theory the astounding diversity they saw in the ways people named ideas and even, apparently, in the ideas they named.' See his 'Language and Difference: The Problem of Abstraction in Eighteenth-Century Language Study', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), 19-36 (p. 19).

²⁷ A similar inference is drawn by Perry Anderson in his discussion of Leavis's idealist criticism: 'a morally and culturally unified audience [...] is a validating reference for the actual operation of the criticism. For nothing was less obvious or to be taken for granted than a stable, shared system of beliefs. Indeed, his very epistemology is the explanation of Leavis's own famous inability to understand or sympathize with *either* avant-garde *or* foreign literature [...]. [...] once time (avant-garde) and place (country) changed, the cultural basis for a shared interrogation collapsed'; 'Components of the National Culture', p. 52.

main focus. In his capacity as a major arbiter of taste in the critical Anglo-centred establishment, Eliot's main impulse is automatically 'to occlude troublesome and inassimilable manifestations of difference by positing a transcendental realm of essential identity'.²⁸

The nature of operations of translation from the cultural to the abstract²⁹ is best illuminated, in semiotic terms, as an allegory of negative/positive, as the following passage will make evident: 'We regard Poe as a man who *dabbled in verse and in kinds of prose*, without settling down to make a thoroughly good job of any one genre. These French readers were impressed by the *variety of form of expression*' (p. 31; emphasis added). In this example, the French criticism is presented as the negative of the Anglophone with a near-symmetrical correspondence: thus, the 'variety of form of expression' the French saw in Poe is equivalent to the 'dabbling' of Poe in 'verse and kinds of prose' that the Americans perceived. The way in which Eliot describes it, the French offer a positive qualification instead of the negative characterisation of the Anglo-Americans, they render a damnatory judgment into a meritorious one. Once again, the representation of the two different interpretative frames is carried out in a binary fashion with each one becoming the positive, or the negative of the other. In this respect, Eliot does not really add anything truly new to his initial figuration of them as an 'immense' appraisal, or a 'negligible' reprobation respectively. He merely clarifies a procedural detail which supports the opening presentation by appearing to penetrate it. The sub-operation, however, is not simply an auxiliary one: by means of this detailed binary depiction, the readers are treated to an inside-look at the workings of the respective critical operations. Guided to identify a process which is transparent to the intellect as two facets of the same thing, they are likely to endorse Eliot's assertion that the transatlantic difference is a predicate of the same critical mind; for, if the narration enables them to discern the identity of Poe's work as well as its dual appearance, there could be no doubt about the accuracy and relevance of the account. In this way,

²⁸ David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1987), p. x.

²⁹ The operation might best be qualified as 'abstract objectivism' - a formulation that is found in Vološinov, *Marxism and The Philosophy of Language*, tr. by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 45.

Eliot is able to solidify the transformation of the bi-focal description into an abstract operation taking place into a single mind, and serving mono-cultural ideals.

Another manifestation of the same photographic semiosis is a general account Eliot gives of foreign perception in poignantly judgmental terms. In a passage quoted above, he points out that '[I]t is possible for foreigners to be mistaken about contemporary writers: I know that the contemporary English estimate of the importance of some French writer, or the contemporary French estimate of the importance of some English writer, can be grotesque;' and, further down the same paragraph, he refers to the 'odd ways' in which the Russian authors seem to Anglophones to express thoughts and ideas (p. 55). If we link these textual occurrences with an earlier passage introducing the canonised opinion of Poe in the Anglophone world, marked by the words *my errors*, *not just*, and *unfair*,³⁰ we can see that the reflective process can also take the form of homology: the possibility of erroneousness befalls both national perceptions. As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, each of the national perceptions of Poe is held liable to one another due to the very fact of their divergence, which seems to be the single element that proves their respective un-truthfulness. Their susceptibility to error simultaneously suggests that they both hold particles of truth and, as such, they depend on one another to form the indivisible, truthful meaning of the work. Thus, divergence acquires eventually a quasi-ontological status. As a result, this mutual dependency foregrounds the invaluable, centrifugal post of the critical observer, who is the only agent able to assert the incomplete (because partially truthful) receptions. This is the ultimate effect of the essay's arrangement, a logical *fuite en avant*. These historical instances appear as having not existed prior to, or outside Eliot's figuration: they are being established in the course of the literary critic's customary work as illustrations of his ability to perceive imaginatively both difference and identity. They are constituted as elaborate constructions of a fanciful, ratiocinative observer.

There is another textual instance that demonstrates the complementarity and, thence, the ontological deficiency of each mirrored reception as opposed to some

³⁰ The last occurrence is found in the sentence '[I]t does not seem to me *unfair* to say that Poe has been regarded as a minor, or secondary follower of Romantic Movement' (p. 29; emphasis added), which again has incorporated the anticipated objection of the French in the careful phrasing of the negative statement.

hidden essence, in the following passage: 'The evidence that the French overrated Poe because of their imperfect knowledge of English remains accordingly *purely negative*: we can venture no farther by saying that they were not disturbed by weaknesses of which we are very much aware' (p. 36; emphasis added). Not knowing enough English, Eliot's understanding goes, the French poets failed to take stock of Poe's linguistic idiolect and its highly problematic nature, evident for any native speaker; thus, it was inevitable that they should perceive it wrongly. This is a typical example of tautological thinking. In this passage, Eliot not only succinctly formulates his approach to the foreign perception but he also characterises it as 'negative' - which correctly identifies its essential deficiency. He basically argues that the response of the French to Poe is pre-ordained by their being non-English. In a sense, this is as far as this approach can take us for the type of mistaken response to a non-domestic work is determined in advance by its very foreignness; as such, it cannot know positively what kind of particular processing foreignness has induced that resulted in a certain unforeseeable judgment of the work. To his credit, Eliot acknowledges that a bi-linguistic prism fails to account for what is precisely the main interest of comparativism, that is to say, the particularity of a specific non-domestic reading that is in excess of the linguistic difference. In a way, such a course of action annihilates in the end genuine interest in the French reception as the latter is said to be already contained in a pre-given linguistic constraint. The articulation of the sentence indicates, nevertheless, in its choice of the word 'negative', the existence of something exceeding it - namely, a positive space. This is precisely the weak link in Eliot's rational handling of the comparative material into a complementary, tidy depiction: for, even if the positive-negative metaphor performs well in terms of a neat narration, it does not adequately account for novel significations, especially 'overrated' ones. Opposed to the metaphor of 'depth/surface' that Williams has profitably used to exploit the challenge of the French re-evaluation of Poe's work, Eliot's complementary semiosis eventually arrests the positive content of the foreign perception of Poe and partially numbs the inquisitive spirit of comparativism.

Tensions such as these are vocally intensified in the course of the narrative. Not only does Eliot choose the linguistic approach that he earlier indicated as 'negative', by taking pains to exhibit 'evidence' of each of the French poets'

‘imperfect knowledge of English’, but he further fortifies the oddity by alluding to a ‘positive’ way to approach the French response. By maintaining the trope of negative/positive opposition, he widens the sphere that the bi-focal criticism is expected to explain even though this seems to be lacking, as yet, the means to do so. Due to its basic epistemological inadequacy, enigma seems now to qualify not the meaning of Poe on the whole but rather his French reception. Whatever triggered the positive reaction to him, it must involve something beyond linguistic constraints, or, conversely, liberties. In narrative terms, this indefinite space between the domestic and the foreign reading is no other than the space separating the ‘negligible’ from the ‘immense’, and its implied vastness renders the deficiency of the linguistic approach proportionately gaping. Is it possible that Eliot intended to undermine his discourse so efficiently?

A possible key to the paradox is the metaphorical valence of ‘negative’. If one decided to reduce the adjective’s role to its signifier, and take it to stand merely as the converse of the sign ‘positive’, one might see a reason why Eliot wished to stick to this particular imagery. The face-value of the signifier reduces the distance from the remote foreign space, and forcibly contracts it into a modest complement of the domestic representation. Thus, whatever the potential importance of the former might be as a valorised object, it is restrained to the negative side of the domestic image. As such, its understanding should depend on the knowledge the critic has of his own literary culture, and who, as a result, does not need to occupy any other position than the native one he already occupies. Only an holistic vision could tolerate this type of metaphor and posit it as valid despite the argumentative sterility it produces, its inevitable circularity. Only on such grounds is it conceivable to understand why Eliot, although having admitted the tautological consequences of a linguistic approach, he nevertheless failed to see it as a syllogistic impasse which would require him to revise it. Thus, from an attempt to explain the French divergence from the viewpoint of linguistic legitimacy he moves to an exploration of how both unite to raise a single, truthful image of the work.

There is another point where Eliot’s description of the French picks up a dormant deficiency of the Anglophone reading: ‘[These French readers] while admitting, if necessary, that much of the work [of Poe] is fragmentary or occasional,

owing to circumstances of poverty, frailty and vicissitude, they nevertheless take him as an author of such seriousness' (p. 31). This remark suggests that, in Eliot's eyes, the French were able to take in the Anglo-American point of view, that is to say, to acknowledge the deficiencies in Poe's work before they chose to take a different stance. But, one soon realises, to embrace and transcend the native outlook is, in a way, to prove its narrowness. It testifies to the fact that there is indeed a worthy content in the French attitude that the narration goes eventually out of its way to quieten. This continent, which remains uncharted by Eliot's account, constitutes undoubtedly the historical and cultural reality of the French perception, its literary specificity. Thus, every time that the French reading emerges assertively in his narrative, as a positive development and not merely as the other side of the domestic content, it causes a momentary collapse in the inner, static logic of Eliot's preferred tropes. No wonder that the transatlantic dialogue has to be presented as a mystery for this provides a necessary safety valve when the foreign constituent, with all its cultural weight, collides with the semiotic logic of positive/negative, challenging its adequacy to account for inter-cultural influence. To put it differently, the semiotic structuration of Poe's transatlantic dossier as Eliot builds it is in a state of constant embattlement; and the struggle is not so much between two different national receptions as between two types of critical explanation, one transcendental, the other material.

A possible answer to the question why these opposing realms had to cohabit in the first place lies in the structural necessity of Euro-centric idealist thought to include its opposite. As Michel Pêcheux has argued, 'thought exists only within a determination which imposes edges, separations and limits on it, in other words, "thought" is determined in its "forms" and its "contents" by the unthought' while producing simultaneously the disappearance of the latter.³¹ The point can be taken further by considerations current in the field of postcolonial criticism, with its relevant pressure on Western-European epistemologies. In such a case, it would read along the lines of Partha Chatterjee's argument: 'Enlightenment itself, to assert its sovereignty as the universal ideal, needs its Other; if it could ever actualise itself in

³¹ Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*, tr. by Harbans Nagpal (London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press, 1982), p. 187.

the real world as the truly universal, it would in fact destroy itself'.³² Thus, it could be stated that the French reception in Eliot's humanist account can occupy the place of 'unthought' that Pêcheux defines as the place which is 'there for nobody', which is 'marked out' for the subject to take, accept, or reject out of a heap of 'non-sense' representations.³³ Pursuing this line of thought from critical linguistic into the domain of reception studies, Tony Bennett affirms this 'ideological circle in which each term begets the opposite it implies and which, in turn, it requires as a condition of its own existence, intelligibility and functioning'.³⁴ The effect of this 'circular exchange' should be described as 'a mutually numbing symbiosis',³⁵ which certainly characterises Eliot's account. Its general outlook constituting the two national receptions as two vignettes of the same mind with no consideration for their mutual cultural embeddedness, has already validated the point about its conceptual limitation.

However, such a constraint can still illuminate the particular way in which Eliot wishes to represent the French divergence. Of particular interest is a variety of modalities whereby the French act is being depicted: 'These French readers [...] they found, or thought they found, an essential unity'; later on, 'they nevertheless take him as an author of such seriousness that his work must be grasped as a whole' (p. 31). The attempt at a definition can, at best, be described as fuzzy. The French act becomes, in turn, a fact (*they found*), a specious and/or self-deceptive belief, or a speculative projection (*thought they found*), an event (*they take him as*), an identification of a predicate (*an author of such seriousness*), an imperative that has not yet been fulfilled (*his work must be grasped as a whole*). Among this disarraying bead of modalities, the ambiguity of the utterance 'take him as an author of such seriousness' stands particularly out given the unequivocally low reputation of Poe in the domestic context. Thus, the clause attributes 'seriousness' to Poe, which means to imply that the feature has preceded his reception. Reading him 'seriously', as the French did, can thus appear as an act of compliance to a pre-existing condition of the work, not as a mere initiative; the French approach represents a response to a serious work awaiting for a worthy audience. Nonetheless, given that Eliot's purpose is to

³² Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), p. 17.

³³ Pêcheux, *ibid.*, p. 188.

³⁴ Tony Bennett, 'Text, Reader, Reading Formations', p. 221.

reify a historical case of transatlantic commerce as an idealised entente, it should be preferable to say that the fuzzy account embodies the intellectual mind as it rehearses different ways of dealing with perceptual deviance.

But there is another aspect of the necessity for such a lack of precision in describing the French reception. The previous chapter, on Williams, has explored the seminal nature of his reading as the direct result of its systemic outlook. The crucial condition that enabled such a systematicity was that Williams grasped a non-native literary perception precisely in terms of contingency, as an effect of overdetermination. Discursive antinomies such as surface/depth, domestic/foreign etc. enabled Williams to bring out the discovery potential of comparativism by reversing the French novelty into a novel signification of Poe in terms of a revamped locality. In contrast, because Eliot's ideological presuppositions consolidate the value of the work as essence and identity, he submits these shifting perceptions in a two-partite construction of the work while at the same time resisting pressures to examine the national repertoires as such. Regardless of their respective *raison d'être*, according to varying patterns of intelligibility and urgency, current in their cultural settings, they have to be united and referred to a stable work in a seamless manner. In fact, by summarising each national reception in a single principle (a perception of wholeness, on the one hand, a perception of parts, on the other) Eliot has already naturalised them completely.³⁵ And, because each is the negative of the other – according to the essay's prevalent metaphor – the question of the genealogy of the French never moves to centre-stage. Momentarily, one notices a syllogistic scuffling breaking loose on the fringes of Eliot's narrative, but that is that: what triggered the French perception, or what is its cultural meaning, these are questions that are relegated for good to a marginal position.

The observation concerning the French poets, that 'while admitting, if necessary, that much of the work [of Poe] is fragmentary or occasional, owing to circumstances of poverty, frailty and vicissitude, they nevertheless take him as an author of such seriousness' (p. 31), shows that the voluntary nature of their reaction

³⁵ Ibid, p. 221.

³⁶ As a consequence, it is only natural within the framework of this naturalised representation that the critic is to proceed, with no further delay, with a treatise on linguistic correctness, predicated precisely on the legitimacy of the native perception.

to Poe did not entirely escape Eliot's intellect. Considering, however fleetingly, the French reaction to Poe as a will to deviate, a desire to transgress, is an option that Eliot was able to contemplate but, unlike Williams, did not finally exploit. This would have meant that heterodoxy could be allowed to take its place within literature, thus undermining its chances to be posited as a unified culture. Having failed to see the breach of the French as an independent and powerful appropriative move, on the basis of its proper contingency, indicative of which is Baudelaire's willpower, Eliot is bound to see it, finally, as a flaw. Regrettably, his overall rationale could not accommodate an independent outlook but, rather, required the perceptive statuses to exist simultaneously, and thence in lasting limbo. This is the crucial point where the semiotic mode becomes semantic, and the negative metaphor he has found useful for his purposes changes into a denotation of weakness, which is going to determine decidedly the foreign reception in relation to the native one.

This is the lengthy section set to establish the linguistic inefficiency of the three French poets who helped to re-establish Poe in the modern literary arena, announced as: 'none of these poets [who found something new in Poe] knew the English language very well' (p. 35). Compensating for the lack of a genetic account, Eliot takes pains to substantiate the damnatory linguistic judgment on the subject of each and every one of the French poets: '[Baudelaire] was never familiar with England, and there is no reason to believe that he spoke the language at all well'; '[a]s for Mallarmé, he taught English and there is convincing evidence of his imperfect knowledge'; and, '[a]s for Valéry, I never heard him speak a word of English, even in England. I do not know what he had read in our language' (p. 36). The tone of this section is factual and the linguistic verdict infallible: 'our own view', he says, 'is supported by our awareness of the blemishes and imperfections of Poe's actual writing' (p. 31). It is no wonder, then, that Eliot will 'illustrate these faults, as they strike an English-speaking reader' (p. 31). This catapult adjudication is detailed in an enumeration of 'imperfections in the *Raven*', a particular instance qualified as 'a freak of fancy' (p. 33), together with identification of inappropriate lexical combinations, with which Malherbe, the narrator points out, 'would have had no patience' (p. 33). The section is strikingly incongruous with Eliot's initial proclamation that he does not care to give a 'judicial estimate' of Poe. Even though it

appears as a sign of contradiction, it is important to recall that this does not truly clash with comparative practice as Eliot conceives it; eventually, he requires from the foreign perception to measure itself against the righteous linguistic and poetic considerations of the native outlook because it has been reduced to the 'other half' of the Anglo-American repertoire. Having no consideration for the genetic reasons of the French interest in and reaction to Poe, Eliot's relating was compelled to be, in the end, judicial.

The manner in which he performs this type of criticism manifests his close affinity with a purist line of descent within the American scholarly and college tradition. Significantly, Eliot proceeds to give a concise philological exposé so as to demonstrate that Poe's poetic composition brakes linguistic usages and fails to conform to the 'right *sense*'. Driven by the primacy of the sound value of words, Poe, goes his argument, is poetically unsuccessful in that he disregards that 'sound and sense must cooperate' (p. 32). The polemic is illustrated by showing why the choice of the word 'immemorial' in the verse '[i]t was night, in the lonesome October / Of my most immemorial year' is incorrect. This critical attitude is more amazing once we take into account Eliot's 'linguistic splintering' in his own poetry. Robert Crawford argued, in relation to *The Waste Land*, that:

The fragment [...] becomes a unit of composition, the poem a shoring together of fragments that raises and exploits questions of cultural coherence and, let's be honest, of linguistic coherence, for there are moments when the poet's native language seems overwhelmed [...]. The poet here is using not so much a language as a linguistic spectrum that, for some moments at least, problematizes the notion of native language.³⁷

The prescriptive argumentation is consummated in the axiomatic utterance 'the dictionary meaning of words cannot be disregarded with impunity' (p. 32). No wonder that the punishment of Poe for such an 'irresponsibility towards the meaning of words' (p. 32) was that 'he has not been taken so seriously in England or America as in France' (p. 33). So, the narrative demonstrates not only judicial prescriptivism, in its most forceful but, also, a personal focus with poignant moral, and even legal, overtones, in the case of words such as 'irresponsibility' and 'impunity'.

³⁷ 'Native Language', *Comparative Criticism*, 18 (1996), 71-90 (p. 75).

It is illuminating to take note of how Eliot clears up the space for what he should have deemed relevant for his exposition. His perspective, initially widened to accommodate bi-focal considerations, has now shrunk back to mono-cultural considerations: there is even a sub-literary area circumscribed by linguistic authority in the form of lexicographic consensus (at one point, he grounds his argument by resorting to the *Oxford English Dictionary*).³⁸ This testifies, inter alia, to the vigour of a scholar tradition that still, in Eliot's time, posits linguistic correctness as an orthodox aesthetic criterion. This belletrist and spiritual tradition, going back to eighteenth-century, attempted to define the conditions of the linguistic, aesthetic and ideological American identity through the inflections of what Janet Sorensen has recently called the 'language of empire'.³⁹ Susan Manning has aptly described a typical case of this, namely the linguistic relations between the Scottish and the British communities in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Emersonian America, in terms of a double bind: on the one hand, 'self-authorisation, recognising no authority' beyond that of 'a nation rhetorically self-dedicated to newness and a purified relationship to language' and, on the other hand, the 'equally unassailable cover of stylistic mastery' that originates in the British metropolis.⁴⁰ In this light, it appears striking that the rejuvenation of the romantic ideal of poetic purification, due mainly to the modernist cause promoted in the first decades of the twentieth century, failed to challenge Eliot's critical language of correctness and conformity in his essays on Poe.

The heterogeneity which is characteristic of the French appropriation of Poe, having the power to affect what was supposed to be the core of the work, a homogeneous substance in itself, has been more or less rendered an element to be exorcised. This operation of authorisation on the basis of a very limited number of principles – for example, rudimentary lexicographic notions – goes hand-in-hand with Eliot's unwillingness to reflect materially on the French reception. As a result, the latter is from then onwards indebted to the native viewpoint for which Poe has not merely a 'meaning' but a 'status', a 'rank' – lexical choices that elucidate the

³⁸ Cf. John Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED* (Princeton University Press, 1994).

³⁹ Janet Sorensen, *The Grammar of Empire*, pp. 7-9.

importance of institutional classification. What is at stake here is not merely an individual literary appreciation, Poe's, but the need to account for a heterogeneous non-native literary perception within the very heart of the mono-cultural literary establishment. If anything, this is so because the argument of semantic purity in the poet's language is much too general to have any serious implications for the perception of Poe's work. Although it misses the mark – to prove the correctness of the native perception – it nonetheless reveals something else, more crucial for Eliot. For, as he puts it in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', '[h]onest criticism and sensitive appreciation is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry'; also he stresses later on that '[t]o divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad'.⁴¹

Coterminous with old rigidities reverberating in Eliot's allusion to linguistic purity is his concern with three aspects of Poe's figure, as he sees it: a) his puberty-like quality, b) his lack of beliefs, presumably moral ones, and c) Eliot's own belief regarding the 'superiority of practitioners as critics'.⁴² The three points, which provide important links, require some elaboration. The first idea, that of Poe as a writer of a 'pre-adolescent mentality', appears at least in two instances in the text: at first, 'Poe is the author of a few, a very few poems which enchanted him [that is to say, the ordinary cultivated English or American reader] for a time when he was a boy [...]. They seem to him to belong to a particular period when his interest in poetry had just awakened' (p. 30). This is re-iterated, at some length, further down the essay:

My account may explain why the work of Poe has for many readers appealed at a particular phase of their growth, at the period of life when they were just emerging from childhood. That Poe had a powerful intellect is undeniable: but it seems to me the intellect of a highly gifted young person before puberty. The forms which his lively curiosity takes are those in which a pre-adolescent mentality delights.

(pp. 34-35)

⁴⁰Susan Manning, 'Scottish Style and American Romantic Idiom', *Language Sciences*, 22 (2000), 265-83 (esp. p. 272ff).

⁴¹*Norton Anthology*, p. 1095, and 1098 respectively.

⁴²The formulation belongs to Frank Kermode; see his introduction to *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 23, footnote 1.

Thus, the native perception of Poe's work cannot be described in terms other than those separating the young from the mature poet.⁴³ Syllogistically linked to this theme is the second aspect of Poe promoted in this manner: 'The variety and ardour of his curiosity delight and dazzle; yet in the end the eccentricity and lack of coherence of his interests tire. There is just that lacking which gives dignity to the mature man: a consistent view of life [...]. [...] all of his ideas seem to be *entertained* rather than believed' (p. 35).

This excerpt can be read in juxtaposition to a passage from Poe's anonymous review of himself, 'Edgar Allan Poe', published in 1845. Elaborating on a point he made earlier, Poe writes about himself:

His style may be called, strictly, an earnest one. And this earnestness is one of its greatest charms. A writer must have the fullest belief in his statements, or *must simulate that belief perfectly*, to produce an absorbing interest in the mind of his reader. That power of simulation can only be possessed by a man of high genius. It is the result of a peculiar combination of the mental faculties. It produces earnestness, minute, nor profuse detail, and fidelity.⁴⁴

It is clear from this passage that Eliot's appreciation of Poe's French attraction failed to take in consideration the 'power of simulation' that Poe has cunningly insinuated within the very domain of earnestness: earnestness seems to be the invariable result of either possession or simulation of beliefs, inasmuch as the reader perceives it thus. The focus in Poe is moved from the producer side of the work onto the reader side, and thus it is closer to what Tony Bennett termed 'cultural activation' of text and reader.⁴⁵ At this point, it is relevant to recall Eliot's indecision to present the French reception as a purely unsolicited reading, his resistance to take it as sign of a will constructed along different cultural lines. The virtual energy of a critical gesture that asserts itself as a wilful, self-induced move escapes a dead-pan intention, which stubbornly confirms the maturity of believed ideas as the sole guarantor of aesthetic value. Surely, Eliot's motivation reflects an ideology that wishes to shield its canonised boundaries against heterodoxy. It is in this sense that Eliot's approach can

⁴³ The same stands for the very first text on Poe featuring similar utterances: 'when we are grown up, his [Poe's] horrors no longer terrify and his wonders no longer thrill'. See 'Eliot on Poe', p. 243.

⁴⁴ *Essays and Reviews*, p. 873; emphasis added.

be viewed as a comparative project that has stopped short of delving into the mechanism of bi-national dialogue. Unless the French repertoire is acknowledged as an act that has reprogrammed literary speculation at will, the bi-prismatic study will eventually have to conceive the different readings as a difference in terms of validity and invalidity,⁴⁶ accuracy and inaccuracy.

The reaction to such a substantial challenge posed by the heteroclite cannot be monolithic even though it is definite. If we return to the first essay of Eliot on Poe, 'Eliot on Edgar Allan Poe', we will find therein an entirely different response. Poe's 'Philosophy of Composition' gives Eliot the impetus not only to seriously consider the essence of what Poe proposes by his 'simulated beliefs', but also to pronounce himself in favour of a reading of the 'Raven' which is sympathetic to the voluntarism of Poe's effect theory:

When we first read the poem, we are likely to take it as a spontaneous romantic effusion upon which the author had expended very little labour. He invites us to regard it as a very deliberate, calculated construction. Now *it is unnecessary to ask whether he really did compose the poem exactly as he asks us to believe he did*, or whether he thought of all the explanations afterwards. *The point is that Poe chooses to appear*, not as a man inspired to utter at white-heat, and not as having any ethical or intellectual purpose, but as a craftsman. He is concerned with the artistic effect.

(*'Eliot on Poe'*, p. 243; emphasis added)

There is no doubt that Eliot does not wish to chastise or resist the evident 'simulation of beliefs', but rather to go along Poe's reading instructions by indicating that the 'Philosophy of Composition' is a 'very novel and interesting examination of it [the poem] by the author'. That this is not an accidental utterance is evident when later in the same essay Eliot accounts for poems such as 'For Annie', and 'Ulalume' in terms of effect ('effect of simplicity, even of artlessness', 'their hypnotic effect', even the synonymous clause 'his [Poe's] power of incantation'⁴⁷) reverberating Poe's poetics. A similar streak is evident in the very first essay that records Eliot's thoughts on Poe,

⁴⁵ 'Text, Reader, Reading Formations', p. 222.

⁴⁶ This formulation takes its cue from Tony Bennett's challenging of 'the procedure whereby the relations between different readings are conceived as differences between valid and invalid, more or less appropriate responses'; *ibid.*, p. 221.

⁴⁷ 'Eliot on Poe', p. 244.

the 'Note sur Mallarmé et Poe', in which a simulation of beliefs serves aesthetical purposes far more important than any sense of moral beliefs:

Donne, Poe et Mallarmé ont la passion de la spéculation métaphysique, mais il est évident qu'ils ne *croient* pas aux théories auxquelles ils s'intéressent ou qu'ils inventent à la façon dont Dante et Lucrèce affirmaient les leurs. Ils se servaient de leurs théories pour atteindre un but plus limité et plus exclusif: pour raffiner et pour développer leur puissance de sensibilité et de l'émotion. Leur œuvre était une expansion de leur sensibilité *au-delà des limites du monde normal*, une découverte de nouveaux objets propres à susciter de nouvelles émotions. [...] c'est un monde réel qui est par eux aggrandi et continué.⁴⁸

With this significant nuance in mind, it should also be added that what makes the reference to the puberty-like quality of both Poe's work and its appeal relevant to Eliot's transatlantic thought is that it echoes, too, a cultural debate in eighteenth century America which advocated a progressive march of human language and civilisation. An exemplar of this type of thought obsessed with language is academic Hugh Blair's 1783 *Lectures* which, according to Susan Manning, were 'immediately and universally adopted by American colleges [...] and became the single most important influence on American university education well into the nineteenth century.'⁴⁹ The language is familiar: 'The progress of language [...] resembles the progress of age in man. The imagination is most vigorous and predominant in youth; with advancing years, the imagination cools, and the understanding ripens [...]. Language is become, in modern times, more correct, and accurate; but, however, less striking and animated.'⁵⁰ There is strong resemblance between Blair's narration, distinguishing between the purity of civility and the immediacy of aboriginal expression, and Eliot's assertions, of which the following are indicative: 'to insist that the poet should be spontaneous and irreflective, that he should depend upon inspiration and neglect technique, would be a lapse from what is in any case a highly civilised attitude to a barbarous one' (p. 41). The closing lines of Eliot's essay intensify the same idea: 'the indefinite elaboration of scientific discovery and invention, and of political and social machinery, may reach a point at which there

⁴⁸ P. 525.

⁴⁹ 'Scottish Style and American Romantic Idiom', p. 269.

will be an irresistible revulsion of humanity and a readiness to accept the most primitive hardships rather than carry any longer the burden of modern civilisation' (p. 42). Moreover, his criticism of Poe's blown-out interest in sound combinations at the expense of accurate meaning is not dissimilar to Blair's use of historical linguistics to narrate the evolution of language from primordial sound-oriented formulations: Eliot, thus, writes that Poe's versification 'has the effect of an incantation which, because of its very crudity, stirs the feelings at a deep and almost primitive level' (p. 31); unsurprisingly, he calls it 'the magic of verse'.

Eliot's prose carries within it the germ of old rhetoric and teaching whilst his distinctly Emersonian mistrust of originality and novelty is manifest in his exclamation: 'The originals are not original. There is imitation, model, and suggestion, to the very archangels, if we knew their history'.⁵¹ In another essay, Eliot asserts: 'True originality is merely development; and if it is right development it may appear in the end so inevitable that we almost come to the point of view of denying all 'original' virtue to the poet. He simply did the next thing'. Pursuing the same logic, he argues more emphatically: 'The [imitation of development] is commonplace, a waste product of civilization. The [imitation of some Idea of originality] is contrary to life. The poem which is absolutely original is absolutely bad; it is, in the bad sense, "subjective" with no relation to the world to which it appeals.'⁵² The moral streak of this type of rhetoric is fuelled in a series of attempted linkages as Eliot proceeds to attribute Poe's 'exceptionality' to an 'arrested emotional development at an early age.' Thus, he continues, '[h]is most vivid imaginative realizations are the realization of a dream' (they are, to use Poe's cunning vocabulary, 'simulated'). A lack of 'moral significance' in a similar form of imagination is the argumentative destination: judicial instincts are irrepressible despite their programmatic renunciation. In May 1935, Eliot wrote, in a letter to Stephen Spender, that '[y]ou don't really criticize any author to whom you have never surrendered yourself [...]. Even just the bewildering minute counts; you have to give yourself up, and then recover yourself, and the third moment is having

⁵⁰ Cited in Manning, *ibid.*, p. 271.

⁵¹ Emerson, 'Quotation and Originality', in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 5 vols (London: G. Bell, 1913), III: p. 278-88.

something to say, before you have wholly forgotten both surrender and recovery'.⁵³ According to this it could be argued that the first moment of Eliot's contact with Poe is somewhat hazy; there is, to be sure, 'delight' and 'appeal', as we have already seen, but the experience is underrated as tied to a 'pre-adolescent intellect'. Eliot's 'surrender' to Poe's verse, therefore, is far from certain; he states that 'one cannot be sure that one's own writing has *not* been influenced by Poe', and that 'about Poe I shall never be sure' (p. 27). Given that the third moment, 'having something to say', or 'providing an intellectual vehicle' to the experience,⁵⁴ did not spring in this case from the moment of surrender itself, Eliot's ambivalent attitude to Poe's work, as well as the comparative framing on the whole, might be explained by recourse to the power of influence of the French symbolist tradition on his intellect; Eliot seems to have been prepared for Poe's modernism 'by quotation and allusion'⁵⁵ and not an authentic moment of 'surrender'. The respect of Eliot for the established order of French poetry possibly triggered an uneasy reflection on the - minor until then - importance of Poe whom Eliot acknowledges in highly irresolute terms. This might also explain his scepticism to fully embrace the French teachings in the case of Poe; as Frank Kermode stresses:

The construction of such contexts [Eliot's "workshop criticism"] must, of course, follow the surrender. In the letter to Spender Eliot warns against doing it the other way round – constructing a system and bringing it to the 'object' under discussion. [...]. Without the first moment there is nothing worth having.⁵⁶

The third factor that determines the ultimate submission of the foreign to the Anglophone perception regards Eliot's own aesthetic belief that '[n]o poet, when he writes his own *art poétique*, should hope to do much more than explain, rationalize, defend or prepare the way for his own practice' (p. 33); and further on, '[w]e are

⁵² The passages come from his 1928 'Introduction' to the *Selected Poems* of Ezra Pound (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 10.

⁵³ Stephen Spender, 'Remembering Eliot', in *T. S. Eliot: The Man and his Work*, ed. by Allen Tate (1966), p. 55-56.

⁵⁴ Kermode, *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, p. 15.

⁵⁵ The expression concerns the Brunetto and the Ulysses episodes in Dante, 'for which', he points out, 'I was unprepared by quotation or allusion'; see *Dante* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929), p. 28.

only safe in finding, in his [the author's, or Poe's] writing about poetry, principles *valid for any poetry*, so long as we check what he says by the kind of poetry he writes' (pp. 33-34; emphasis added). In other words, poetic theory is valuable only insofar as it is supported by practice - one of the founding principles of Eliot's aesthetics. It is evident that generalisation of this type is a concealed attempt to defuse interest or potency in the foreign reading of Poe as it endorses the ideals of 'legitimacy' and 'normativeness'.⁵⁷ However, in endorsing this regulative norm of aesthetic writing, and trying to give it doctrinal status, Eliot fails to take account of a basic parameter of the comparative setting, which is nothing other than the contingency of different reading formations. The 'validity for any poetry', he explicitly states, cannot be unified for all audiences and all historical actualities. What is more, the case of Poe's European acculturation - according to Eliot's own framing principles - ironically belies the rational necessity of a generalised 'validity' and, in actual fact, could in a single blow overturn it altogether. The discontinuity Eliot remarks between Poe's theory and practice (p. 34) did in no way prevent his work from fertilising non-English poetry and prose. In other words, the 'invalidity' of a work does not prevent it, historically, from being extended and from being used in different ways in other cultural contexts - which surely is what Baudelaire's project was not the first to showcase. In fact, there is a twisted game that the word *survival* plays on Eliot's rationale - a word used by him when he deals with the issue of validity in perception of foreign works. With emphasis put on the identity of the work, on its purity and linguistic conformity, it should have been difficult for Eliot to perceive survival as conditioned by renewed distortions and misapprehensions.⁵⁸ Heterodoxy as the very guarantor of a work's afterlife greatly clashes with the supremacy of identity that grounds Eliot's discourse. Accordingly, insisting on linguistic correctness resembles an act of defence against the conflicting multiplicity of literary perceptions, a wish to dispense with this reality altogether.

⁵⁶ Kermode, *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Both terms are found in Said, 'Representing the Colonized', p. 221, in which they are discussed as the two enabling tropes in contemporary ideological discourses.

⁵⁸ The idea is succinctly expressed by Robert Escarpit: 'Let no book be called good or bad until there is no longer anybody to misunderstand it - which is the way books die.' 'Creative Treason', p. 21.

Eliot's approach is essentially determined by the deletion of a crucial fact: this is the grounding of aesthetic discourse on cultural or social repertoires. As Bennett put it, 'the interaction between the culturally *activated* text and the culturally *activated* reader [is] an interaction that is structured by the material, social, ideological and institutional relationships in which *both* text and readers are inescapably inscribed'.⁵⁹ A connection between Poe's aesthetics and craftsmanship was indeed raised as a criterion of evaluation, but the enabling condition of this is, first and foremost, cultural currency within its original environment. Attempting to impose this criterion on a different environment on the basis, say, of its theoretical solidity and worthiness, is a pointless circumvention of cultural imperatives. Eliot may insist on the worthiness⁶⁰ of a specific theoretical axiom; his insistence remains the camouflaged instruction of a dedicated, but disarmed, pedagogue of the Enlightenment. What is more, Eliot's normative principles, stemming from his training in humanist cognitive technologies, are bound to lead to internal contradictions, identified within and between his three essays. An important, though undeveloped one, is found in his 1943 text, where he basically follows the critical path which is the exact opposite of the previous axiom. Contradicting his stated belief in the bond between aesthetics and poetic practice, Eliot utters 'I cannot altogether separate his poetry from his prose,' even though, he adds, 'I wanted to limit myself to his poems' ('Eliot on Poe', p. 243). Interestingly, given what he was to state five years later, he stresses 'the impossibility of separating [...] his prose from his verse' as directly springing from 'the impossibility of separating Poe from his reputation'. In a stark opposition to the injunction of verifying the worthiness of aesthetic writings on the basis of the literature produced, he concludes that Poe's three (basic) essays on the art of poetry are 'of considerable importance because 'they throw some light upon his own poetic principle' ('Eliot on Poe', p. 243). The retroactive power of the French lesson on Eliot's thought is undoubted, although its particular manifestation in his critical narratives cannot but be sporadic and distorted.

⁵⁹ 'Text, Reader, Reading Formations', p. 222.

⁶⁰ Thus, Eliot asserts, in relation not only to Poe but all poets, that 'what he has to say *that is worth saying* has its immediate relation to the way in which he himself writes or wants to write' (p. 33; emphasis added).

If, according to his belief in the ineluctable tie between practice and theory, he wishes to discredit Poe as a poet, this is tantamount to discrediting the appraising reading of the French – and yet theirs is the prism he claims to have adopted. It is understandable, therefore, why a streak of repressed disavowal of the foreign non-conformity runs through the essay and is continually and unsuccessfully stemmed. The irony is that this state of affairs could not have emerged had it not been for an acknowledgment of the eminent reputation in Europe, mainly through the modernist agenda promoted via the French symbolists and their transatlantic influence. Led by his desire to demonstrate identitarian continuity, Eliot seeks nonetheless to understand Poe's 'historical position', 'historical importance', or 'significance' (all in 'Eliot on Poe', pp. 243-44). In his other account of foreign influence, 'the American Literature and the American language', Eliot pontificates on the 'verdict of history' (*AL*, p. 58), thus betraying the heavy weight of an institutionally-minded training. By giving precedence, in his relating, to the native over the foreign perception he has established principles which supposedly had the power to regulate and control the account of the foreign; he did not realise how destructive, internally, the impact of this layout would be in the end.

To sum up, the main source of interest in Eliot's transatlantic effort lies mainly in the incapacitating effect of its principles. Incapacitating and not a simple failure for it nonetheless allows to glimpse into the essential challenge that the foreign reputation represented for a critic like Eliot: namely, heterodoxy, and its devastating implications for the establishment of a consensual literary system arranged according to Enlightenment principles. As we have seen in the course of this discussion, there have been many instances in which Eliot painfully ruminated on the serious faults of his approach, dictated by a wish to refigure the Anglophone and the Francophone reputations of Poe as a single critical act with two facets:⁶¹ at one time it appears

⁶¹ A similar point was raised by Lawrence Venuti who, in his discussion of Coleridge's and Eliot's individualism, bases his findings on Eliot's contradictory discourse: 'Eliot's critical discourse puts forward several theoretical points that appear truly anti-romantic in their opposition to the romantic valorization of the individual, but his formulations of them are filled with contradictions in which the individual reemerges to prevent a complete theoretical break. Once again, such blind spots will be treated as a heuristic device which, in this case, exposes the individual as the conceptual limit of Eliot's discourse'; 'The Ideology of the

tautological, at another it leads to impasses while at no time does it allow to perceive the foreign structurally. Even when he is ready to present his 'own impression' of Poe's work, this is by no means an untainted exposition but rather an ethnocentric opinion already marked, on the level of signifiers, by the intrusion of an allocentric perception. His essay 'From Poe to Valéry' put next to 'A Dream Within a Dream' showcases that he momentarily considered tracing a contradictory path leading to an entirely different vista of the problem of Poe.

As the foreign element asserts itself in the comparative setting of enlightened critical discourse, it emerges as a disquietening reality. An attempt to pacify the inherent danger by treating the differentiated approach as an abstracted entity, another modality of the critical mind, is the strategy Eliot has chosen as the most advantageous in the face of contradictory needs but, as anticipated, this was insufficient. As a result, the invention of abstract complementarity as an ingenious solution to a tortured problem does not leave much room for discursive development, as substantiated in the incongruities and gaps that cause Eliot's account to vacillate and to be, at times, argumentatively stultified. This is the meaning of the numbing effect of an approach which is comparative only by name, and which attracted the chastising attention of Edward Said. Referring to the 'fundamental historical problem of modernism' with relation to the imperial domain, Said pointed out the 'formal irony of a culture unable either to say yes [...] or no [...]: a self-conscious *contemplative passivity* forms itself [...] into *paralysed gestures of aestheticized powerlessness*'.⁶² In his view, European modernist writers who 'encountered various Others', failed to react in a way other than re-assertion and lukewarm defence of old certainties, a pattern particularly manifest in these essays of Eliot on Poe.

Eliot's response to concrete signs of alterity and heterodoxy has another important aspect. Although he seeks to establish the French reception as auxiliary to the Anglo-American reception, the process is one of procrastination, and the development of 'From Poe to Valéry' is actually its tortured chronicle, haltingly moving towards its moment of completion. Moreover, when the treatise on Poe's erroneous consummates the process, the event is veiled (admittedly, imperfectly)

Individual in Anglo-American Criticism: The Example of Coleridge and Eliot', *boundary 2*, 14: 1 (Fall 1985 / Winter 1986), 161-93 (p. 175).

beneath a rhetoric of universal pretences, substituting literary with linguistic criticism. Lastly, the realm in which the foreign finds some sort of redemption is the realm of theoretical, abstract thought, in the person of one of Poe's least influential disciples, Paul Valéry.⁶³ Assuming that Eliot wished to conclude what his ideological tenets dictated, it is clear that he was resistant to name the process, the operations, and the principles according to which this conclusion occurred.

In his brilliant chronicle of Eliot's centrality in the debate on English literary canon formation, John Guillory has shown that 'Eliot's desire for a literature that is "unconsciously Christian"' was a desire to install literature 'as a sensibility that performs the social function of doxa'⁶⁴ – producing a state of cultural homogeneity, of unquestioned belief – without ever requiring the 'imperfect' supplement of orthodoxy, without specifying what these beliefs are'.⁶⁵ Eliot's stakes in safeguarding the status of literary culture as one embodying the (phantasy of) 'total culture, inclusive of belief'⁶⁶ made it imperative for him, in the instance of his critique of Poe, to invent a configuration that could embrace and finally absorb the legacy of heterodoxy in shifting literary reputations: the invention was the anthropomorphic fusion of the two disparate historical criticisms within the same speculative intellect. This is also the reason why Eliot is in no hurry to translate this invention into a doctrinal thesis by, say, accounting for the receptions in solely evaluative terms. The success of this effort depends precisely on how firmly it will resist raising itself into a lesson in comparative exercise⁶⁷ – the risk being to become a relativistic chronicle, which is precisely against Eliot's ideological principles.

In this respect, all the internal contradictions and misgivings I have been identifying in the course of this chapter can be seen as the result of a conscious effort to avoid foregrounding the ideological necessities of his critique as specific doctrinal credos. The essence of the enigma trope concerns not so much the Poe case but the

⁶² 'Representing the Colonized', p. 222-23; emphasis added.

⁶³ 'From Poe to Valéry', pp. 39-42.

⁶⁴ Guillory uses the term in the sense that Pierre Bourdieu has given it; see *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 164.

⁶⁵ *Cultural Capital*, p. 138.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 154. See also Wallace Fowlie's argument about Eliot's Christian belief expressed mainly in terms of a need 'to make its necessity felt in the modern world'; 'Baudelaire and Eliot: Interpreters of their Age', in *T. S. Eliot. The Man and his Work*, pp. 299-315 (p. 301).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

transatlantic discrepancy which needs to be transcended by canonised discourse, and transformed into doxa (identity) without using coercion. In fact, the two different national opinions about Poe count only as threats to the universal spirit of literature;⁶⁸ they inevitably activate a mechanism of dual thinking which will eventually undermine the centrifugal core of canonised critical discourse founded on notions of a unified tradition. Therefore, their historical existence, once acknowledged, represents a real challenge for the poet/critic who wishes to re-confirm the legitimacy of the literary institution against the spectre of a mounting heterodoxy. This is the meaning of their peculiar, rotating presence in his essays. His misleading attempt to trace Poe's 'historical importance' – that is to say, oddly, importance untainted by novelty, fancy, opinion, or divergence – brings ambivalence to the heart of criticism. By embracing a dual variety of literary reception and wishing to establish a notion of totality of meaning,⁶⁹ Eliot invites diversity from the periphery of the Anglocentric national system to its very core: that is to say, into his own critical pronouncements.

⁶⁸ Or, as Guillory stressed, in relation to Eliot's legacy to the idiom of New Criticism, 'the practice [of interpretation] does not imply the necessity of making strict evaluative distinctions among the canonical authors so much as between literature and mass culture; *ibid.*, p. 141.

⁶⁹ Such a notion of totality underpins, according to Perry Anderson, the 'pseudo-centre' that tended to be generated out of the 'void at the centre of the English Culture'; 'Components of the National Culture', p. 56.

Chapter 3. Aldous Huxley: Defining vulgarity, prescribing disruption

Aldous Huxley's 1931 essay, 'Vulgarity in Literature'¹ incorporates, inter alia, his estimation of Edgar Allan Poe's artistic faults. In the canonical, by the thirties, context of the French teaching of Poe's aesthetical value, Huxley's pronouncement on the matter joins the ongoing discussion triggered by Poe's European *succès d'estime* by foregrounding the notion of literary nativity. Huxley's critical opinion is added to those of William Carlos Williams and T. S. Eliot who pursued, in different ways, the question of literary judgment in a case of transatlantic dispute. These texts have been treated as norm-setters because, between them, they form a particularly coherent, despite the different standpoints, reformulation of the issue of Poe's meaning on the basis of notions of locality and nativity. Huxley's text, in particular, will be analysed as a mediating instance between the positions occupied in the Anglophone critical establishment by Williams and Eliot. The analysis will demonstrate the particular ways in which it proposes what I would like to term an *indigenised*² definition of the figure of Poe, an outgrowth of which will be Eliot's subsequent response. The link between Huxley and Eliot appears to be more obvious given that they embody the hyphenated Anglo-American positionality. As for William Carlos Williams, Ned Stuckey-French points out that Williams 'disapproved of their [Pound's and Eliot's] expatriation, choosing instead "contact" with the New World and its possibilities'.³ At any rate, their shuffling between the two coasts of the Atlantic – with Huxley resettling to America in 1937 and Eliot 'sinking his roots into old England', as Wallace Fowlie puts it⁴ – seems to have played a significant role in their heavy investment to the stability of linguistic nativity.

¹ Aldous Huxley, *Music at Night and Other Essays, Including 'Vulgarity in Literature'* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), pp. 270-336 (esp. pp. 297-309). Hereafter page numbers will be given in the body of the text in parentheses.

² The term originates in anthropological efforts to account for 'creolised' cultural forms in a process in which '[t]ransformed by and recontextualized within local communicative structures, imports [...] become indigenised'. See Robert J. Foster, 'Making National Cultures in the Global Ecumene', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 20 (1991), 235-260 (p. 251).

³ 'An Essay on Virginia', p. 101.

⁴ 'Baudelaire and Eliot: Interpreters of their Age', p. 302.

The reactionary impulse which, according to a basic premise of Part II, motivates this development will be made evident in the terms in which Huxley handled the figure of Poe. In this framing, the Anglophone literary discourse becomes at this stage meaningful as a backlash, reacting to the French reinvention of Poe by insisting on a commonsensical conceptualisation of nativity, linguistic and literary. This is only one step away from Eliot's treatment of the Poesque texts according to principles of correctness and perfection in relation to the English language. In fact, it seems to be the case that the monocentric impulse behind Huxley's essay provides a source of motivation for Eliot's idealised approach, as much as the French metatexts, or the original Poe for that matter. However, only after Poe's work is re-introduced into American letters via the Trojan horse of French symbolism does the corrective mood of the critical agents who speak in its name become apparent. The critical essay that forms the object of analysis of this chapter embodies a kind of insular native discourse that strives hard to reinstate, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, national literature as mainstream, concentric orthodoxy. With Aldous Huxley being at the time the essay was composed, a highly publicised figure (in slick American magazines like *Vanity Fair* and *Life*), it seems that his critical position draws its legitimacy from the elitist rhetoric of an iconic intelligentsia.

The discussion of Huxley's essay will be two-partite according to the change of focus from bi-centric (involving references to the French metatexts), to monocentric (involving references to Poe's work alone, and the notion of vulgarity assigned to it). The reactionary basis of Huxley's response to the Baudelairean appropriation of the figure of Poe is evident in the off-hand dismissal of it: 'We who are speakers of English and not English scholars, who were born into the language and from childhood have been pickled in its literature – we can only say, with all due respect, that Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry are wrong and that Poe is not one of our major poets' (p. 297). But, most importantly, he reduces the French revisionism to a simple matter of lack of knowledge of the English language, typical of foreigners. The banality with which he asserts a certain type of linguistic nativity reverberates in the confidently proclaimed, if unproven, foreigners' naivety when reading poetry in English: linguistic nativity, therefore, franchises literary

discrimination. In an unmistakable linking of critical authority and linguistic nativity, Huxley formulates the problem at hand in the following vernacular manner:⁵ 'How could a judge so fastidious as Baudelaire listen to Poe's music and remain unaware of its vulgarity? A happy ignorance of English versification preserved him, I fancy, from this realization' (p. 305). The style is characteristic of the way in which Huxley built his counter-defensive against Baudelaire's project as if he sought, while incorporating the French inscriptions, to dispense with them in a crude, by and large, and demotic way.⁶ Therefore, the first observation should be that such a commonsensical discussion of literary language as a closed-off achievement of the past posits criticism as a monolithic act which treats challenges of its canons of taste as occasions for further entrenchment.

Still, the linkage Huxley presupposes between knowing the language and understanding its literature seems, however, to be valid only in the case of foreign readers of literature given that, when he discusses the general ability to criticise, he vocally dismantles any connection between the two. In effect, he insists that literacy and 'literary discrimination' are not to be blended together: 'Because we all know how to read, we imagine that we know what we read. Enormous fallacy! In reality, I imagine, the gift of literary discrimination is at least as rare as that of musical discrimination' (p. 315); and, further down, he expands:

Because we have spent some years in acquiring the art of reading books, we think we have acquired the art of judging them. But in spite of universal education, there are still vast numbers of people who spontaneously love the lowest when they read it, and a great many who, loving the highest, also love, if not the lowest, at any rate the low and the middling with an equal and quite indiscriminating enthusiasm.

(p. 315)

⁵ Adorno has similarly pointed out the commonsensical quality of Huxley's ideas in the *Brave New World*, as well as its effects of circularity; see his essay 'Aldous Huxley and Utopia', in *Prisms*, tr. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), pp. 97-117 (p. 115).

⁶ The same attitude is witnessed in Yvor Winters's dismissal of Poe. He writes, thus, that 'Poe has long passed casually with me and most of my friends as a bad writer accidentally and temporarily popular'; and then he juxtaposes this opinion to that of Poe's 'impressionist admirers', 'even in England and in America, where a familiarity with his language ought to render his crudity obvious', see 'Edgar Allan Poe. A Crisis in the History of American Obscurantism', in *In Defense of Reason* (The University of Denver Press, A Swallow Press Book, 1947), pp. 234-61 (p. 234).

The importance of the distinction between the act of reading literature and the act of judging literature is that it establishes a critical division of labour - a first step towards installing a classificatory hierarchy of readers of literature in which the grass-roots level ('vast numbers of people', product of 'universal education'), or 'a lower caste in the critical hierarchy' (p. 314) is clearly separated from 'the Brahmins of the critical hierarchy' (p. 314). The idea was going to be exploited more fully in the project announced by Jonathan Culler in his 1975 *Structuralist Poetics*, proposing that literary study move away from interpretation proper and into examination of 'literary competence'. Coined on the basis of the much revered by structuralists 'linguistic competence', the project was forcefully criticised by Mary Louise Pratt,⁷ who draws attention to Culler's discussion of the effects of poetry in the following manner:

The argument is rooted in the notion of aesthetic effects, which we are invited to think of as intuitive and universal. Should they not prove universal, however, analysts are to assume the dissenting readers have made a mistake. And suddenly we have a burst of language that sounds fine when thought of as characterizing debate among peers, but which rather chills the soul when thought of as applying in situations of hierarchy.⁸

This is Huxley's case too.

The difficulty he is faced with is to accommodate non-native literary perception in an account of general literary perception in terms of a linguistically unified audience, which is nevertheless divided along ideological, not to say class, lines. For, if the French are to be excluded from literary appreciation of American works on grounds of their exteriority to national belonging, then what are we to make of the internal divisions that mark the native perception? To complicate matters more, Huxley gives a minor specification as to who should be the legitimate voice of Anglo-American linguistic nativity: this is personified in the clause 'speakers of English', who are then opposed to 'English scholars'. And the seemingly downgrading attitude towards professional readers of literature is somewhat repeated

⁷ 'Interpretative Strategies/Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader-Response Criticism', *boundary 2*, 11: 1 and 2 (Fall/Winter 1982/83), 201-31 (p. 215-21).

in a letter he addresses to Valéry: he speaks there of those readers of Poe ‘pour qui la connaissance de sa langue est, je dirais, instinctive et non seulement une possession de l’intelligence consciente’.⁹ His allegiances, therefore, within the framework of the single-language literary public seem to be varied and shifting, thus obscuring his ideological stakes in relating monocentric and bi-centric literary perception. What is certain is that his insight into the native - and thenceforth authorised - judgment ceases to be unproblematic once the non-native element recedes to the background. As a result, the commonsensical approach to nativity begins to look unstable, more of a rough and ready definition invented only for the sake of defending a type of nationally-centred criticism whose legitimacy is thrown into disrepute by non-native discourse.

For there are more contradictions in the pipeline, flickering into attention once Huxley’s argument leaves the terrain of poets who are not speakers of English and enters into the particulars of a linguistically unified audience. Significantly, the emphasis he places on the irrelevance of technical knowledge in the case of musical language - which he considers to be analogous to that of literature - makes the frailty of the native stance all the more striking for it is precisely a technical point he is about to raise when he rebukes Poe later on (pp. 298-309). His entire argument about Poe’s vulgarity is, in effect, based on Poe’s poetical craftsmanship - or rather lack of one - especially his use of dactylic metre, proper names, and lexical arrangement.¹⁰ Thus, Huxley’s diatribe against technical mastery directly unsettles the nativity approach whose relevance and adequacy remains of necessity questionable; the following passage illustrates the point:

We admit quite cheerfully the truth about music. But if music were not an educational luxury; if every child were taught its notes as now it is taught its letters, if piano playing were, like geometry and French grammar, a compulsory subject in every school curriculum, what then? Should we as easily admit our lack of musical discrimination as we do at present, when most of us have never learned to read a simple melody or play on any instrument? I think not. *Knowing something about the technique of music, we*

⁸ Ibid., 220.

⁹ Letter no. 286, dated 11th of March, 1929, in *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. by Grover Smith (London: Chatto and Windus, 1969), p. 309.

¹⁰ In his letter to Valéry, Huxley mentions, in particular, ‘le choix des mots’, ‘l’harmonie verbale’, and ‘surtout [...] les rythmes’; *ibid.*, p. 309.

should imagine that we knew something (or, more probably, that we knew everything) about its substance.

(p. 315; emphasis added)

With respect to the above mentioned problem of how the bi-centric and the monocentric elements are combined in Huxley's approach, the passage could be used as evidence of a qualitative identification of under-privileged children, who cannot afford music classes, with foreign readers of literature. The way in which Huxley argues about what type of insight into English literature can be had by a non-English is strikingly colonial. He observes, for instance: 'For 'newly' does not rhyme with 'Thule' – or only rhymes on condition that you pronounce the adverb as though you were a Bengali, or the name as though you came from Whitechapel' (p. 308). Furthermore, Huxley seems to construct the notion of vulgarity around the metaphor of the 'untouchables',¹¹ that is to say, those who 'are, intrinsically, what those wretched Indians who sweep the floor and empty the slops are by accident' (p. 274). The same metaphor re-appears when Huxley is talking about the 'South American parvenu, dazzling with parasitic ornament, and vulgar' (p. 296), or, more disparagingly, 'the *rastacouaire*' who 'might display the twin cabochon emeralds at his shirt cuffs and the platinum wrist watch, with his monogram in diamonds' (p. 307). His central idea of vulgarity is phrased, at one instance, as the 'Levantine love of display' (p. 308), whilst the same notion is behind the clause 'diamond rings symbolical of Levantine opulence' (p. 329). However, as it will be argued presently, the suggested double disadvantage of non-Anglophones¹² which gains its momentum mainly from presuppositions of social inequalities and prejudices could, according to the same logic, be turned on its head and pave the way for a quite different approach.

Despite what these initial logical incongruities might suggest, it is beyond doubt that a predominant language of exclusion with respect to the French perception of Poe transpires in most of Huxley's references to it. The proper section on Poe

¹¹ For a personal account of the social position of the untouchables, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Bonding in Difference', in *An Other Tongue. Nation and Ethnicity in the Linguistic Borderlands*, ed. by Alfred Arteaga (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 273-85 (p. 274).

¹² Certainly, the formulation 'non-Anglophone' is a thin disguise for the designation 'non-English' which clearly insinuates stereotypes of cultural inferiority, to which Poe's poetry allegedly gives embodiment.

begins by a question triggered directly from the French teaching: 'Was Edgar Allan Poe a major poet? It would surely never occur to any English-speaking critic to say so' (p. 297). Huxley does not give a chronicle of the foreign perception, only a quick glimpse by referring particularly to the last epigone of Baudelaire, Paul Valéry: 'Only a year or two ago M. Valéry repeated the now traditional French encomium of Poe, and added at the same time a protest against the faintness of our English praise'.¹³ It is interesting to note that Huxley initiated an actual dialogue with Valéry by addressing a letter to him on the occasion of the publication in 1926 of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, for which Valéry wrote the introduction, an essay entitled 'Situation de Baudelaire'.¹⁴ There are significant occurrences of a distinctly positive impression of the French reckoning of Poe in the letter which, to some extent, might be justified by common courtesy. For instance, the theme of Poe's aristocracy, first instilled by Baudelaire, emerges in relation to the 'harmonies assez péniblement populaires' of 'The Raven' in a matter-of-fact manner: 'car, c'est étrange, ce grand aristocrate qu'était Poe a souvent exprimé une matière Mozartienne ou Chopinesque par des melodies d'orgue de Barbarie'. In the same vein, Huxley alludes to a hidden 'masterpiece' quality in Poe's poems, an allusion that could not have manifested itself had it not been for the canonised critical visibility of the French critical discourse; for instance, '[l]es autres poèmes sont comme 'The Raven' – des *chefs d'œuvres* manqués qui n'attendent que le traducteur génial pour devenir parfaits. En attendant, cette [ce] voile presque imperceptible de la vulgarité verbale et rythmique les couvre et, pour des yeux anglais, les défigurent.'¹⁵

As one can see in the quotation, especially in the last sentence, the vulgarity that the English speakers discern in the poems' verbal and rhythmic makeup is a 'curtain'¹⁶ covering something that is explicitly stated as a 'masterpiece'. Not in the letter, nor in his essay on Poe does Huxley wish to explore further the idea that so

¹³ The original source of the paraphrase reads as follows: 'Ce grand homme [Poe] serait aujourd'hui complètement oublié, si Baudelaire ne se fût employé à l'introduire dans la littérature européenne. Ne manquons pas d'observer ici que la gloire universelle d'Edgar Poe n'est faible ou contestée que dans son pays d'origine et en Angleterre. Ce poète anglo-saxon est étrangement méconnu par les siens'; see Valéry, 'Situation de Baudelaire', p. 607.

¹⁴ Smith, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, pp. 308-309.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 309; emphasis added.

¹⁶ The French letter to Valéry is accompanied in Smith's edition, by its translation into English; no name of translator is being mentioned; *ibid.*, p. 308.

strikingly deviates from his overall position. The inscription ‘stillborn masterpieces’ is an unqualified acknowledgement of the French role in imagining and advancing such a potentiality, namely Poe as a poet par excellence. And, although the French insight is not fully embraced by Huxley, at the very least it becomes discernible, barely concealed beneath the material manifestation of the work. This bizarre trace of a discursive negotiation with the French claim, activated within the frame of a distinction between depth and surface, does not seem to be far away from William Carlos Williams’ critical vocabulary, as we saw in Chapter 1 of Part 2. So, when pushed (as the case is with this virtual communication with Valéry), the representative of native claims to Poe shows a willingness to incorporate the divergent view within a striated view of the work of art – and this is the path Eliot will be exploiting more fully later on. In fact, the simile by which the poems ‘only await the talented translator’, as Huxley puts it, ‘to become perfect’ unwittingly gives the ideal account of the transatlantic entente, which sits oddly with the antagonism for authority that Huxley’s native claims constitute.

The harmonious co-operation, which chooses translation as its site, is duly consummated in the beginning of the same paragraph. Referring to the effect of the translation by Mallarmé who ‘a transfiguré “The Raven” à peu près comme Beethoven a transfiguré dans ses grandes variations la valse de Diabelli’, Huxley exclaims: ‘et le grand poème manqué anglais est devenu le chef d’œuvre français’. The assertion rephrases brilliantly Baudelaire’s far-reaching project as sheer factuality by tracing a smooth, against all odds, and successful transference of meaning, intention and effect that could not have possibly been simply inter-linguistic, translational. The factuality of the complex operation (including translation, transformation, misprision, reinvention) clashes with Huxley’s own presuppositions. Such an impossibility is blatant in the English rendering of the surprising sentence: ‘and the great stillborn English poem became the French masterpiece’. What used to be a ‘stillborn English poem’ in the native context is now, thanks to the French mediation, reborn into the non-native context. To paraphrase Huxley’s terms, the ‘greatness’ that lied hidden and distorted in the native diction of the poem re-emerged unscathed in the foreign tongue. However, the letter to Valéry is undoubtedly centred around the idea that ‘[p]our les étrangers toutes les

nuances sont imperceptibles – celles de vulgarité tout aussi bien que celles de noblesse raffinée. C'est seulement parmi des étrangers, doués en ce cas d'une surdité et d'un aveuglement heureux, que Poe puisse jouir de la réputation d'un vraiment grand poète'. The ambivalence in both versions can be read as the condition for a creative misprision. At any rate, it would be hard to argue that the astounding possibility denoted in the previous, sympathetic summarization of the American-French collaboration in restoring the life of the original was Huxley's main intention.

But this glitch is all the more why its textual emergence in this direct address to Valéry is indicative of the complex discursive effects of clashing reading repertoires. Huxley's predilection for metaphorical language runs, in this instance, counter to his search for evidence of Poe's poetic flaws, as it cannot easily transcend the factuality of Baudelaire's impact, and its deeply unsettling effects on Anglocentric insularity. Huxley's determination to base his polemic on the legitimacy of nativity, which should immobilise ipso facto foreign inscriptions, cannot possibly succeed in purging his discourse from these inscriptions and, thence, signs of Poe's merit. The native is already becoming a beleaguered field by the fact that it has to mediate, as a matter of course, non-native discursive signs. As in the case of Eliot, the highly prestigious inscriptions of praise, Poe's *succès d'estime*, interfere organically with the rhetorical articulation of the critical response of Huxley too. It seems that the consummation of the canonisation process of Poe as a mainstream critical issue tends to catch the critical law-givers off-guard; for they do not seem to be prepared for the effects of a renaming of Anglo-American literature which originated in Europe, as a consequence of which their monocentric reflexes are only partially operational.

Significant signs of ambivalence as to Poe's artistic worth are also found in the 'Vulgarity in Literature' in instances where the narrative context suits neither and both divergent views at the same time. We read, for instance, in the assertion 'a taint of vulgarity spoils, for the English reader, all but two or three of his poems – the marvellous 'City in the Sea' and 'To Helen', for example, whose beauty and crystal perfection make us realize, as we read them, what *a very great artist perished* on most of the occasions when Poe wrote verse' (pp. 297-98; emphasis added). That this comment is imbued with the unsettling 'interference' of the French opinions is made

even more evident in the following sentence which declares that '[i]t is to this *perished artist* that the French poets pay their tribute' (p. 298; emphasis added). This may be read together with another significant clause, a few lines further down, specifying that '[t]he substance of Poe is refined; it is his form that is vulgar' (p. 298). Read thus, Huxley's expression pushes forward the distinction he has already underlined between '*la vulgarité verbale et rythmique*' of the poems and their hidden excellence. It seems that it is now Huxley's turn to pay his tribute to the French aesthetic perception and grant that there is greatness in Poe, only that this is relegated to an obscure realm beyond the 'veil' of the words and the rhythms of his poetry. Brought together, these different metaphorical enunciations can be seen to enhance one another in different ways: for instance, the image of the 'perished' is not dissimilar to the image of the 'concealed', buried or hidden behind a visible form. In effect, the translation of the 'perished' into the language of the 'hidden' could be seen as a functional integration of the French revision as it allows it to survive the trip across the Atlantic and be retroactively valorised: for if Poe's merit had perished for ever there would be nothing left for a reader like Huxley to discover behind the veil of his words and metres, there would be no way to ascertain that there was greatness lain in his poems. In other words, the scheme is invented as a much resisted accommodation and receptacle for the French interpretation.

Under the pressure of a counter-estimation and against his better judgment Huxley allows his figuration of Poe to be destabilised by referring to the 'refined substance' of Poe, to 'a very great artist'. The repeated designation of Poe as a 'very great artist perished' is unnervingly incongruous with Huxley's rejection of Poe's poetic greatness. The incongruity is indeed conceptually threatening, and not merely because it momentarily offers a gratuitous perspective of an approach alien to his. A far more important reason is that the analysis Huxley is about to embark on focuses on the verbal and metrical form of Poe's poems which, albeit compelling for any native speaker, has been rendered much too thin and frail a demonstrative instrument, as thin as a mere 'veil'. Not only is one impelled to question how an insightful view of the work can come forth from such 'disfiguring', in Huxley's own words, material; the question also springs to mind of whether the approach constitutes the right starting point in the first place given that it is said to conceal

some substance of great value. Its stated vigour has already been largely eroded as a direct result of Huxley's own narrative manipulation.

This is so for another reason. The means of examination that Huxley valorises is linguistic nativity, the advantageous position of which he constantly repeats and which, according to his own formulations, obliges him to focus on the verbal and rhythmic clothing of Poe's poetry. But this can only mean that by necessity his critical activity is dictated by and confined within the limits of linguistic propriety, an indispensable corollary of speaking and reading English as a native language.¹⁷ These limits emerge clearly in the sentence, '[n]ot being English, they [the French poets] are incapable of appreciating those finer shades of vulgarity that *ruin Poe for us*' (p. 298; emphasis added). The formulation suggests two important parameters: first, that there is something to be ruined, most probably an amount of poetic worthiness in Poe, and secondly, that what ruins literary appreciation is the very fact of being native. It is as if the nature of nativity, which is virtually and compellingly self-established as a default arbiter of taste because one needs not define it, acquires now the mien of a stultifying disadvantage one cannot escape from. What initially gave it critical plausibility and ascendance becomes now its corrosive agent. Thus, even though Huxley means to present nativity as an advantageous vantage point of critical estimation, he actually suggests it as a confining reality of, possibly, distorting implications in the same way as the 'verbal curtain' of the poems is said to 'disfigure' them 'to English eyes'. The same stands for a clause already cited, '[a] taint of vulgarity *spoils, for the English reader*, all but two or three of his poems' [emphasis added].

Inversely, the negative connotations of these verbs – 'spoil', 'ruin' – are accompanied by a positive vocabulary that describes the non-native perception, as can be seen in the following examples:¹⁸ 'A *happy* ignorance of English versification

¹⁷ 'Limit' here is taken to constitute a restrictive reality in the sense that it valorises conceptual exploration in a confined space, while keeping it at the same time from being extended beyond the circumscribed realm it delineates and allegedly controls.

¹⁸ For the analysis of these instances, I am indebted to John Sinclair's notion of 'semantic prosodies', and in particular the work done in corpora linguistics that has disclosed the potential of observation on the basis of clashes in habitual collocates; see Bill Louw, 'Irony in the Text or Insincerity in the Writer: The Diagnostic Potential of Semantic Prosodies', in *Text and Technology. In Honour of John Sinclair*, ed. by Mona Baker and others (Philadelphia/ Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1993, 157-77 (pp. 166-73)).

preserved him [Baudelaire], I fancy, from this realization [of Poe's vulgarity]' (p. 305); and, in the letter to Valéry, he similarly confirms, 'des étrangers, *doués* en ce cas d'une surdité et d'un aveuglement *heureux* [emphasis added]';¹⁹ ignorance of English is still designated as such, and 'deafness', and 'blindness' are still explicitly named but, inadvertently, these are rather 'happy', 'fortunate' occasions. One could argue that Huxley's very insistence on claiming linguistic nativity as an unanalysed, presumably natural concept that legitimises an exclusive, segregative view of foreign perception leaves this crucial swerving from his intention exposed. It seems that reducing literary appreciation to a common denominator of linguistic adroitness eventually shrivels the value of the actual judgment of Poe Huxley advances. There is an alarming conflation of general and literary language at work here, and Huxley could not have been blind to its erosive implications. From this angle, the inadvertent slippages which were identified above should betray a quasi-automatic reflex from Huxley's part to restore aesthetic value. He did so by simply adding value to a critical statement about the literary work that can only be non-native, the implication being that the non-native misunderstanding²⁰ can be counted on to surpass that part of national literature which is shared by general language, and is thereby exposed to banality. In an ironic paradox, then, Huxley's investment in the legitimacy of the native depends on the existence of the foreign deviation as warrant for literary ideality.

The use of the word 'perish' to describe an unrealised potential in Poe's poetic development suggests that he is indeed a perished great artist to the eyes of his compatriots, or the Anglo-American speakers in general. This is not only a factual reality recorded in the actual perception of Poe by English speakers, but also an abstract observation made on the grounds of the congenital insularity of native literature and literary appreciation. If the language of the native is, as Huxley maintains, compelling in literary judgment, then every time native speakers of English wish to read Poe they will invariably be aware of his vulgarity. It is interesting to note that the abstraction is of such a force that it can be seen to have

¹⁹ Smith, *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 309.

²⁰ For the notion of misunderstanding, and especially its creative transformation in the sense of misprision, see Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 77ff.

caused even the historically recorded opinion. The atemporal aspect of the verbs 'spoil', and 'ruin' used in these instances speaks eloquently of Huxley's desire to instigate a certain idea of nativity whose main characteristic should be determinism. In this rigid framework, any challenge coming from outside the native can only provoke further enhancement and consolidation of its legitimacy. If nativity is to be proclaimed a commonsensical principle of judgment, it follows that any challenge to the authority of its claims is bound to be imported; also, as soon as it is introduced, it is bound to collapse into this artificially unified, 'native' system. The transcendental nature of this rhetoric will be brought into sharp focus by Eliot, who will attempt to sublimate the historical appearance of the different receptions.

The last instance of a forked description concerns an affirmation regarding the foreigners' powers of perception: 'Poe does the equivalent of this [the wearing of a diamond ring on every finger] in his poetry; we notice the solecism and shudder. Foreign observers do not notice it; *they detect only the native gentlemanliness in the poetic intention, not the vulgarity in the details of execution*' (p. 298; emphasis added). It seems that the native reflex triggered by the insertion of the French perception into Anglocentric criticism is destined to produce another discursive slippage whereby the presumed compelling relevance of linguistic nativity becomes a de facto embattled principle. To begin with, the ambivalence of the adjective *native* as a modifier of the 'gentlemanliness in the poetic intention' is striking: as a result of its narrative emdeddedness, it remains unclear what the content of this adjective is, or who enunciates the clause for that matter. Furthermore, the distinction between poetic intention, on the one hand, and execution, on the other, recalls the previous description of Poe's poems according to the opposition of a hidden, refined substance and its verbal and rhythmical veil. However, it brings forth a new element which sadly remains underdeveloped, namely, a possible reference to Poe's own effect theory. Although Huxley fails to fully realise the importance of such a path, he still seems to be giving some credit to the French for they could not have 'detected' something that was not there in the first place; thus, he attributes 'gentlemanliness' to Poe's 'poetic intention' in perfect accordance with the notion of his 'aristocracy', already vouchsafed in the letter to Valéry. But what is the connection between Poe's 'refined substance' and the 'poetic intention' the French discerned in his work? What

inferences can be drawn from the assumption that the two are identical? Huxley readily withdraws the kaleidoscope and shrugs off its intriguing findings as soon as he glimpses at them. He remains tantalisingly indifferent to the interesting connections that his essay encloses thereafter as inert potentialities.

But this does not discredit his approach; the contrary would in fact be more accurate especially if it is primarily considered within the Anglophone situation. In this 'silencing' gesture of Huxley, one can notice a lack of response to the emphasis Williams placed on the methodological originality of Poe's work, seven or so years earlier. But, more importantly, this half-open door to Poe's own regulation of perceptive attitudes that is his effect theory can be viewed as a valuable invitation that Eliot took up. In this connection, Eliot responded imaginatively to the potentialities of a native critical discourse which half-acknowledged its opposite in a contorted but still richly suggestive manner. The previous chapter has substantiated how Eliot's more extended discussion of the French judgment fertilised in a variety of ways the logical organisation of his treatise, and resulted in a piece wherein the obvious corrective attitude of the critic is constantly checked by self-censorship. Even though he tried to escape the injunction 'stay at home'²¹ Huxley has uttered in a different context, he nonetheless ended up reinstalling the authoritative claims of the native over the non-native; inevitably and after a particularly tortuous itinerary, the French proposal about Poe's signification was to be assigned an inferior discursive position. In the light shed by a consensual understanding of the issue of Poe, Huxley's text offers the germs that are going to bear fruit in the clearly articulated comparative perspective of Eliot on the basis of which the latter will contrive his

²¹ In a travelogue entitled 'America', Huxley commented directly on what it means to be a traveller who has to account for radical differences he experiences in his travels. 'Richer by much experience and poorer by many exploded convictions, many perished certainties', the traveller 'should stay at home', if s/he likes to believe that 'one's own opinions, one's own way of life are alone rational and right'. And, reaching a conclusion, '[c]onvinced by practical experience of man's diversity, the traveller will not be tempted to cling to his own inherited national standard, as though it were necessarily the only true and unperverted one. He will compare standards; he will search for what is common to all; he will observe the ways in which each standard is perverted, he will try to create a standard of his own that shall be as far as possible free from distortion.' Against this culturally liberal stance, one could in fact consider the way in which Huxley responded to the challenge of the transatlantic discrepancy as an outright discrediting of tolerance. For quotations, see Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), pp. 287, 288-90.

unified fantasy of Poe. Conversely, the internal misgivings and inconclusiveness that hamper Eliot's comparative account are better understood when compared to Huxley's unequivocal nativity outlook as its perfected consummation.

Huxley's bicentric account is clearly incomplete if it is not seen together with Eliot's version of the transatlantic exchange. To detail these points, let us first notice how the terms of the question are reminiscent of Eliot's stating the opposing ends of Poe's reception, the French and the Anglophone judgments respectively. First, Huxley adheres to the binarism of the critical challenge, as it was later to be designated by Eliot. The discrepancy of the two receptions is equally pronounced in Huxley's account, and is followed by equally judgmental designations: the French are 'wrong', and, as for the native standpoint, Huxley acknowledges that to the French 'we seem perversely and quite incomprehensibly *unjust*' (p. 298; emphasis added). In the last utterance, instead of Eliot's internalised guilt of a possible erring native judgment, we get an objectified account, whose externality is enhanced by an added element of relativity of appearances ('we seem').²² Moreover, an embryonic component of the 'enigma' emplotment of Eliot is found in Huxley's insistence on the excellence of the French poets as critics: 'the best poets [...] and the best critics, too; [...] excellent poets [...] admirable critics' (p. 297) – an insistence which first brushes the paradox of excellent critics who have 'gone out of their way to praise' Poe only to be readily absorbed into the straightforward assertion that they are, simply, 'wrong'. The useful paradox was taken up with no delay by Eliot whose comparative setting was created, as if by magic, around the magnetic tension between two opposing claims of Poe's significance; this required that the commonsensical authority of the native be offset by the institutionally strong and prestigious discourses of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry.

Unlike Eliot, however, Huxley transforms the riddle into a very obvious commonplace: instead of the explicitly stated 'enigma' of Eliot, there is a straightforward declaration of overestimation by Huxley. As a consequence, the intricacies and inflections transpiring in Eliot's sustained effort to avoid an unequivocal solution to the riddle are all swept aside in the definitiveness of

²² This factual mode is related to a prior reference to Valéry, who is said to have voiced 'a protest against the faintness of our English praise' (p. 297).

Huxley's sharp ruling of the matter. Huxley seems to be inhabiting the native position with an insouciance and confidence that Eliot does not allow himself. He, thus, ascertains that '[n]ot being English, they are incapable of appreciating those finer shades of vulgarity that ruin Poe for us, just as we, not being French, are incapable of appreciating those finer shades of lyrical beauty which are, for them, the making of La Fontaine' (p. 298). In his letter to Valéry, we find a near-verbatim declaration: 'si les Français apprécient Poe plus que ne font ceux qui parlent sa langue, c'est pour les mêmes raisons que les anglais [...] n'apprécient pas La Fontaine et Racine'. In his willingness to concede equal lack of understanding of each other's literatures, his summary of Anglo-centric literary discrimination is a lesson in triviality. The eminent role of linguistic nativity in literary perception is precisely what will haunt, and eventually frustrate, Eliot's handling of his comparative subject matter.

Another significant similarity between the two essayists concerns the binary distinctions they both advance when narrative traces of the French discourse find their way into their own writing. Huxley's distinction suggested in the image of a refined poetic substance lying beneath the formal features of the work is analogous to Eliot's distinction between a partial and a holistic view of Poe's work. Indicative of the importance of Huxley's reading, it can be argued that Eliot reformulates and consummates Huxley's distinction by picking up its loose ends and summing up Poe's work as the hidden essence that the French discerned, on top of the partial view of the Anglo-Americans. This approach has to assume that what consummates Poe's significance, for Eliot, is what the French brought forward, which is at the same time what the Anglo-Americans have missed due to their insistence on formal analysis - as Huxley's approach makes clear. At this point, it needs to be pointed out that Eliot realised the limits of the nativistic outlook articulated by Huxley, even though this did not prevent him from reaching conclusions steeped in mono-centric insularity. With him, native blindness to the possibility of an alternative, internal²³ significance in Poe's work is balanced by the daring disparity of a new illumination of the work originated in the French meta-texts. The voicing of this 'refined

²³ Internal, here, could stand for the hidden, almost private area of emphasis that Baudelaire's project embodies; cf. Chapter 2, Part 1.

substance', seen by Huxley to lie hidden in the depth of the poems (underneath their surface, as Williams would have it), was structurally necessary for Eliot in order to have a full sense of Poe – a type of raw material for the transcendental construction he proposes. And although he initially put the two national receptions on a par, he was by the end unable to resist the nativistic pull and to pierce positively into the novelty of the non-native approach. As for Huxley, his haphazard admittance of the dual representation stops short of exploring its implications, unlike both Eliot who tried to mask the disclosure of the concentric criticism's inadequacy, and William Carlos Williams who explored it systemically to great benefit for his modernist pursuits.

The dialogue with Eliot continues in the course of Huxley's particular counter-attack on Poe's aesthetic appraisal. This is primarily focused on his versification and, in particular, his use of the dactylic metre which - 'strong, insistent and practically invariable' - is but a 'metrical short cut to music', instead of providing 'a music appropriately modulated to his meanings' (p. 300). The remarks bear on the first two stanzas of Poe's 'Ulalume', verses also commented in Eliot's essay, 'From Poe to Valéry'. The difference seems to be that Eliot restricted his criticism to Poe's use of words, which were said there to be disrespectful of the dictionary meaning. It seems that the two writers embark on a joint effort to demolish Poe's poetic merit by analysing two different aspects of aesthetic composition, i.e. verbal and rhythmical respectively. Huxley's lesson in English tonal stresses, which 'are not, as in French, equal, but essentially and insistently uneven' (p. 306) seems to be complemented by the lexicographically-minded, proscriptive approach of Eliot. Both operations point to what Huxley explicitly defines, in relation to the speculated French understanding of Poe's language, as 'only a distant and theoretical knowledge of our language' (p. 306), as opposed to a knowledge shared by native speakers.

Interestingly, the patronising attitude of a native speaker in both accounts has inevitably to recede to a speculative discursive mode when it comes to discussing the foreign statements positively. The (distorted) understanding of a foreigner remains, in the last analysis, beyond the native's understanding for exactly the same reasons that dictate his/her superiority in native literary perception. The native critic speaks a pidgin idiom when it comes to assess the foreign appropriation of Poe. In his own

attempt at understanding, Huxley exclaims: 'such verses as, "It was down by the dank tarn of Auber | In the ghoulishaunted woodland of Weir"', must have taken on, for Baudelaire, heaven knows what exotic subtlety of rhythm' (p. 306). In this instance, the total obscurity, for Huxley the 'native' observer, of Baudelaire's positive response is translated by him in a commonly available colonial trope, that of exoticism. By attributing 'exoticism' to Baudelaire's reading, Huxley acts as a local agent who takes up a position of observer with respect to his/her own cultural production. But, by the same token, resorting to such a discursive qualification is similar to denying the foreign reception the status of a positive critical language, and finally to reassert the exemption of nativity from the need to define itself, its exceptional conceptual status.²⁴ Faced with the same problem of viewing the foreign positively, Eliot concluded that there was no way to do so other than the negative one, the tautological. As I had the opportunity to note earlier, nativity emerges as an insurmountable conceptual confinement; blunt with overuse, it is nonetheless becoming clear now that its binding force is, in the main, elocutionary as it does not allow the comparatist to 'name' the foreign.

In both accounts, the linguistic-nativity approach reaches a logical end, a dead-end in understanding as a consequence of its insurmountable congenital limitations. Admittedly it can give a classificatory account of the foreigner's perception by resorting to a tautological definition but it can never relate to it positively; it cannot account for it as a novel configuration of meaning and aesthetic praxis, significant in itself. Huxley's account encircles both national agents, and imprisons them in a compulsive notion of 'indigenouslyness'²⁵: Anglo-Americans are sealed in their nativity and Francophones in their foreignness.²⁶ Paying the cost of

²⁴ Robert J. Foster pointed out that 'almost all of the authors writing about the making of national cultures expound or exploit some theory of the taken-for-granted, of the processes by which contingent and constructed identities become rendered as attributes of a self-evident and unquestioned order of things'; 'Making National Cultures', p. 237.

²⁵ A brilliant study of 'the illusory ideal of indigenouslyness' which is unmasked by 'foreign words' inserted into the national lexicon was T. W. Adorno's lecture 'Words from Abroad', pp. 189-90.

²⁶ For a similar outlook, which is mindful of the danger in too neat a representation of allo-centrism, see Benita Parry, 'Resistance Theory / Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism', in *Colonial Discourse / Postcolonial Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 172-96 (p. 186-88).

recurring internal contradictions, Eliot self-consciously acknowledged the native as an essentially 'negative' approach, whereas Huxley's determination to defy its circularity destines his essay to remain gloomily locked in its arid rationale. The fact that it is freed from any major contradictions of the kind that hamper Eliot's is also evidence of its failure to get involved in the ideological and aesthetic dilemmas the latter faced head-on. On the other hand, and without the shadow of a doubt, by dint of the principles of linguistic correctness and relevance it applies with conviction, Huxley's text marks the ultimate rational limits of Eliot's idealistic orientation with fortified visibility.

The passage from the bi-centric to the mono-centric perspective announces the main part of Huxley's discussion of Poe's case which is on the whole treated as an instance of literary vulgarity. This section seeks to explore the ideological settings of his management of Poe, both in his choice of field and manner of analysis and in his discursive choices, namely culturally situated metaphors defining vulgarity. The first choice concerning the arena in which Huxley deploys the bulk of his combative argumentation is poetry. The choice is significant in that he localises critical attention in a realm that represents only part of Poe's aesthetic production and disregards his prose and critical writing; secondly, this is done in a strikingly technical fashion which further constricts the potential overall importance of the author. It seems that both aspects of his approach indicate a clear-and-dry determination to close the matter. In this, he entirely confirms Eliot's summarisation of the particularity of the Anglo-Saxon attitude, expressed in these words: 'Anglo-Saxon critics are [...] more inclined to make separate judgments of the different parts of an author's work'.²⁷ Through this prism, one can better understand how Eliot conceived a perspective that would balance the 'partial' native viewpoint by the European holistic approach.

Some of the rhythmical 'imperfections' that prevented Poe from being 'taken seriously' in the Anglophone world constitute the aim of Huxley's demonstration, an aim he pursues in a precise and inventive way. But the technicality of Huxley's effort, which should in theory enhance its plausibility seems, on the contrary, to be impinging on its efficiency given that Huxley brushes aside possible aesthetic

²⁷ 'From Poe to Valéry', p. 31.

reasons for such poetic sloppiness as Poe's. In other words, he does not present the formal features of Poe's poems as outgrowth of an aesthetic outlook, born out of necessity, thus de facto denying evidence to the contrary Poe gives in his self-conscious critical pieces. For instance, a passage quoted earlier, referring to 'poetic intention' versus poetic 'execution' is a puzzling reminder of this deliberate gap. As a consequence, the accusation of vulgarity finds its uneasy way in moderated utterances, such as, for instance, 'a taint of vulgarity', 'finer shades of vulgarity', 'peculiar tinge of badness', or 'vulgar accents', to name but a few occasions. But this is as far as Huxley can go; in no important way does he exorcise the sterility of his narrative.

Having adequately stressed the role of this structural looseness in the claims of the native, the next step is to try to trace the actual, if undeclared, aesthetic premises according to which the essay articulates its assault in terms of craftsmanship. These premises can be re-assembled piecemeal in Huxley's description of what Poe did wrong in his rhythmical choices. In short, the essay reports that Poe failed to 'create a music appropriately modulated to his meaning' and, instead, he 'shovel[led] the meaning into the moving stream of the metre and allow[ed] the current to carry it along on waves that, like those of the best hairdressers, are guaranteed permanent' (p. 300). The theme of the 'personal music of the poet's own meaning' (p. 301), one that is 'in his own musical hair' (p. 301), 'a personal music, made to the measure of the subject and his own emotion' (p. 301) is continually juxtaposed to a craftsmanship chastised because it aims for a musicality 'imposed on [the artist] by nature' (p. 304). The prevalent metaphor is music,²⁸ which helps Huxley to articulate the ideal individuality in poetic articulation on the basis of 'the difference between ready-made music and music made to measure' (pp. 301-302).

The form of music/poetry Huxley repudiates is expressed in its likening to the 'barrel-organ rhythms' (p. 301), the mechanicity of which he goes on to juxtapose to the valorised neutrality of metrical devices offered by 'tradition' (p. 304). The key

²⁸ As Susan Bernstein has shown in her brilliant study of literary and musical virtuosity, *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, music was the realm to which the ideality of lyrical subjectivity was relegated in the nineteenth century when the latter found itself shaken in its privileged, until then, poetic environment.

element in this equation is *neutrality* because, according to Huxley, it allows the artist to adapt the verse in order to match the significance intended by him; neutrality is seen to shelter aesthetic significance against alienation. The comparison between Poe and Milton's verses helps Huxley to give a concluding statement: he stresses the latter's poetic success in that his 'music fits the sense like a glove' (p. 302). The functional link between neutrality and the agreement that should ideally exist between sense and form is also stated in the following instance: 'This music of Poe's – how much less really musical it is than that which, out of his nearly neutral decasyllables, Milton fashioned on purpose to fit the slender swiftness of Proserpine' (p. 303). The ideal of 'neutral material' is also repeated in the metaphor of painting: 'Good landscape painters seldom choose a 'picturesque' subject; they want to paint their own picture, not have it imposed on them by nature' (p. 304) – a significant enunciation which reverberates in the subsequent valorisation of 'unspectacular neutralities'. Thereafter, Huxley repeats the same idea: 'good poets avoid what I may call, by analogy, "musiquesque" metres, preferring to create their own music out of raw materials as nearly as possible neutral' (p. 305).

One could summarise the undeclared aesthetic basis of Huxley's criticism as the expression of a subjectively conceived meaning²⁹ via a neutral artistic means; in order to utter the meaning intended by him, the poet has to use unmarked, as it were, artistic devices. Their neutrality, goes the argument, should make them susceptible to whatever alterations and modifications the artist needs to make in order to fit significance into a form rendered supple: 'The ordinary iambic decasyllable, for example, [...] can be now a chasuble, a golden carapace of sound, now, if the poet so desires, a pliant, soft and, musically speaking, almost neutral material, out of which he can fashion a special music of his own to fit his thoughts and feelings in all their incessant transformations' (p. 304). The conception of a poetic device that, with the proper modifications, fits the meaning captured by the poet entails that 'all strikingly original metres and stanzas' which are 'only illegitimate short cuts to a music' rob art from its task to produce 'individual music', and are, in consequence vulgar

²⁹ Earlier on in the essay, Huxley formulated the artistic aim as an 'ambition to render, in literary terms, the quality of immediate experience – in other words, to express the finally inexpressible' (p. 292). At another point, he delineates man's relations with the world around

substitutes. The fact that these ‘permanent waver’ metres, on which Huxley harps on, are external to the poet’s individual meaning renders them irrelevant and unfitted to it; they draw attention to themselves, rather than the poetic work, and thence distort intrinsically what used to be conventionally, what ought to be, the essay suggests, a harmonious relation between intention and execution.³⁰

On the basis of such a reconstruction, Huxley goes on to chastise Poe for his pursuit of originality with a vengeance as a desire to ignore the ‘good sense of the poets’, as well as the ‘less blatantly musical metres of tradition’, aimed at synchronising the poet’s self and the ‘execution’ of his ‘poetic intention’. Binarisms such as the latter indicate a critical lexicon which was formed in the aftermath of Romanticism and whose aesthetic enterprise consisted in pitting the self against the non-self. The premise would be the same if we chose instead to follow Adorno’s expression: ‘[t]he opposition of mind and nature’, he stresses in his critique of the *Brave New World*, ‘was the theme of bourgeois philosophy at its peak. [...] Mind, the spontaneous and autonomous synthesis achieved by consciousness, is possible only to the extent to which it is confronted by a sphere outside its grasp, something not categorically predetermined – “nature”’.³¹ The essay clarifies that the danger against which the poet struggles is the appropriation of his meaning by a monolithic, all-powerful Nature - a major trope in the heyday of Romanticism. And this is precisely where Huxley’s point of resistance is situated. His unwillingness to discuss Poe’s poetics is, in effect, a resistance to give it the status of a conscious, purposeful reply to a world rendered impersonal by the onslaught of mass capitalism. Assuming that the essay is grounded on the relation between self and non-self as a *sine qua non* for art, the insistence on the mechanical nature of Poe’s particularity shows Huxley’s bad faith in relation to the radical transformation of artistic production. Starting from this premise, I would like to argue that the mechanisation of modern life in a mass

him as a ‘borderland between “subjective” and “objective”’, ‘which literature is peculiarly, perhaps uniquely, well fitted to explore’ (p. 293).

³⁰ Terry Eagleton summarised the harmony of this relation in nineteenth-century English literature as ‘a point of balance at which inwardness could combine with an essential externality to produce major art’ or, in the same vein, as ‘that interaction between particular commitments and the structure of a whole society’, that was ‘active and vigorous enough, whether as conflict or congruency, for great literature to be possible’. See his *Exiles and Émigrés: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), pp. 10, and 11.

³¹ ‘Aldous Huxley and Utopia’, p. 102.

industrial society such as America does not even begin to take the place of Nature as embodiment of the non-self, against which the poet's expressiveness needs to be articulated. What is more, this is precisely the idea that is being suggested not only in Poe's original work (verse and prose), but also in the correct identification of its main formal features by Huxley. The connection was first made by Walter Benjamin in the much quoted piece he devoted to Poe's 'Man of the Crowd': 'It is marked by certain peculiarities which, upon closer inspection, reveal aspects of social forces of such power and hidden depth that we may count them among those which alone are capable of exerting both a subtle and a profound effect upon artistic production'.³²

The deciding factor is that Huxley's discourse revitalises romantic concerns, especially the necessity to ascertain human subjectivity via art and against an overbearing objective world. Although Huxley manages to perceive the formal imprints of modern-day mechanisation, he refrains from naming its source, which has irrevocably problematised any discourse of subjectivity. It is as though the work, especially in its impersonal, mechanical articulation, is reduced to a mere reflection of a social reality external to it, rather than being regarded as its mediation.³³ For Huxley, Poe's mechanical poems resemble 'barrel-organ rhythms', mimetically reproducing an inhuman music, reflecting but not mediating the industrial chime of urban mass society. The detachment, stressed earlier, of Huxley's overwhelmingly technical treatise from any aesthetic justification appears now to have a reason. As its organisation testifies, the objective pole of the relation that determines the artistic activity appears to have vanished,³⁴ and traces of it, persistent references to the mechanical aspect of the poems' metrical and lexical articulation, survive only on the textual surface in a virtual limbo, disconnected from any context of signification. Moreover, to denounce mechanicity as a principle of poetic combinations, as Huxley does, is to attempt to maintain the validity of the relation between self and non-self

³² 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, p. 166.

³³ In this, Huxley undoubtedly echoed the intellectual consensus of the radical critics of the thirties and the forties, who, in the words of Amy Kaplan, were characterised by 'their deterministic view of "material reality, hard, resistant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant" and for their expectation that literature should mechanically reflect this "reality", unrefined by the intervention of the "mind"'; see 'Absent Things in American Life', p. 127.

³⁴ For the line of argumentation I am following at this point I am indebted to Paul de Man's article 'Allegory and Irony in Baudelaire', and especially the theoretical premises; pp. 101-119.

denying that it has in effect been rendered obsolete within the industrial frame in most of the Western world; the only way out for a criticism which is reluctant to acknowledge the resulting radical re-organisation of art and knowledge is to deny the artist the right to state his position in a commodified literary market. In other words, the artistic work has to be idiotic since the critic fails to see it in its cultural situatedness. This motion is simultaneous with the reification of individuality and the 'hypostatisation of the observer as a disinterested critic', as Adorno pointed out.³⁵ Huxley, Adorno continues, 'cannot understand the humane promise of civilization because he forgets that humanity includes reification as well as its opposite, not merely as the condition from which liberation is possible but also positively, as the form in which [...] subjective impulses are realized, but only by being objectified'.³⁶

Signs of this failure transpire in another significant essay of the time. D. H. Lawrence shows in his essay 'Edgar Allan Poe'³⁷ a superabundance of mechanical qualifications concerning Poe's work. To highlight these links, it is important to turn to Lawrence's argument:

It is this mechanical consciousness that gives 'the fervid facility of his [Roderick Usher's] impromptus'. It is the same thing that gives Poe his extraordinary facility in versification. The absence of real central or impulsive being in himself leaves him inordinately, mechanically sensitive to sounds and effects, associations of sounds, associations of rhyme, for example – mechanical, facile, having no root in any passion. It is all a secondary, meretricious process. So we get Roderick Usher's poem, *The Haunted Palace*, with its swift yet mechanical subtleties of rhyme and rhythm, its vulgarity of epithet. It is all a sort of dream-process, where the association between parts is mechanical, accidental as far as passional meaning goes.

Usher thought that all vegetable things had sentience. Surely all material things have a *form* of sentience, even the inorganic: surely they all exist in some subtle and complicate tension of vibration which makes them sensitive to external influence and causes them to have an influence on other external objects, irrespective of contact. It is of this vibration or inorganic consciousness that Poe is master: the sleep-consciousness.³⁸

³⁵ 'Aldous Huxley and Utopia', p. 116.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³⁷ The essay was included in his 1923 anthology *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Penguin Books), pp. 70-88.

³⁸ 'Edgar Allan Poe', pp. 83-84.

Even though different in accent and tone, both essays establish an interconnection between ‘vulgarity’ and ‘mechanicity’ in Poe’s art: ‘mechanical consciousness’, asserts Lawrence, ‘gives Poe his extraordinary facility in versification’, an idea fortified in the textual proximity of ‘mechanical subtleties of rhyme and rhythm’, on the one hand, and ‘vulgarity of epithet’, on the other. Thus, his description sheds ample light on Huxley’s equating ‘mechanical consciousness’ with ‘the ready-made music of highly original metres and stanzas’ (p. 301). There is genuine agreement on what this mechanical imagination lacks: it is ‘real central or impulsive being in himself’, according to Lawrence, or ‘the poet’s own meaning’, his ‘own emotion’ (p. 301), according to Huxley. However, its importance is more pronounced in Lawrence whose anthropocentric account accordingly renders Poe, the artistic self, a ‘master of the sleep-consciousness’. The way in which Lawrence describes Poe / Roderick Usher is poignantly surgical and suggests that at the same time when external, inorganic things acquire a ‘form of sentience’, man loses his humanness (in terms of passion or impulsiveness). His reconstruction of man’s existence in the world transforms, in effect, his anthropocentric account into a robotic scenario. Thus, if we place Huxley’s poet - emitter of literary significance as it is contained in the poetic self - along Lawrence’s poetic consciousness, which is ‘mechanically sensitive to sounds and effects, associations of sounds, associations of rhyme’, we are then not far away from Walter Benjamin’s germinal insight into Poe’s modernity. With respect to ‘The Man of the Crowd’, he stresses that ‘Poe’s text makes us understand the true connection between wildness and discipline. His pedestrians act as if they had adapted themselves to the machines and could express themselves only automatically. Their behaviour is a reaction to shocks’; and, immediately afterwards, ‘[t]he shock experience which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to what the worker “experiences” at his machine’.³⁹

The shared theme of mechanicity brings to focus the aesthetic presuppositions of the two writers in their handling of Poe, their reluctance to link their important findings to the challenge of industrialisation for literary writing. The idea simply suggests itself that by failing to place the mechanicity identified in Poe’s formal devices within the strenuous context of massive production in American

³⁹ *Illuminations*, pp. 172 and 173 respectively.

literature they passed over the opportunity to redefine literature in its modern context. This opportunity was offered by the French unconditional re-valorisation of Poe's work, an instance of literary production which consisted in churning out sensational artistic commodities in the form of magazine pieces. By giving prestige to Poe's particular response to a sea-change in conventional literary making, French critics restored artistic integrity to a low-profile, facile literature which illustrated how it was possible to negotiate the new conditions of aesthetic articulation. One is obliged to see this as an important opportunity offered to the concentric perception of English literature whose available critical vocabulary kept it from comprehending the meaning of these new conditions. As shown in Chapter 1 of Part II, William Carlos Williams lent this germinal teaching an attentive ear, and swiftly responded to the reversal of values it represented. Unlike Eliot, he negotiated the surface-to-depth ratio in a manner which foregrounded form rather than content, or system rather than theme. Thus, he repositioned the entire problem of poetics by making his own locality the very condition of literary judgment, and bravely acknowledged the aesthetic irrelevance of self-to-non-self relation. In contrast, Huxley as well as Lawrence, restricts mechanicity to a mere descriptive tool and deflects its importance as a valid mediation of the industrialised conditions of artistic production. In fact, the acumen of Huxley's observations about the metrical mechanics of Poe suggests that he came very near to disclosing the reversal of the self-to-non-self poetics which Poe's 'vulgarity' announced in his day. Since he failed to acknowledge such an alarming perspective it was imperative for him to find an effective alternative: what he chose was to eclipse the French intuition and re-state the injunctions of a sensitivity that is more flagrant in Eliot who, for his part, was quick to translate into the idealist idiom.

Equally significant is the verbal clause 'protest too much', Huxley's main trope for arguing his case for Poe's vulgarity.⁴⁰ This is because its particular verbal aspect subtly suggests that the adoption of a specific poetic device is determined by incorporation of opposition, or resistance to it, thus transferred inside the work of art. The function of the clause is evocative; it activates a strong social referent, that of an

⁴⁰ With twenty-odd occurrences in the essay, the trope of 'protesting', or 'protesting too much' is as important conceptually as the notion of vulgarity.

emphatically present communicative situation between the poet and his interlocutors divulged in the medium of the work. In other words, the 'protest' trope presupposes that the poem is composed in principle in a way that a priori seeks to disarm challenges of its value taking place in the communicative situation that the poem constitutes. Thus, it betrays an apprehension about poetic language widespread in modern times. Susan Bernstein has associated the 'erosion' of lyrical poetry with 'a general destabilization of language directly related to massive developments of journalistic discourse following the invention and refinement of print'.⁴¹ The instrumentality language acquired for the urgent needs of an industrialised economy has caused a generalised suspicion towards 'the idealized expressive function that comes to be reserved for poetry'.⁴² The reason why the discursive modality of 'protesting too much' is culturally relevant becomes evident when Huxley locates the site of anxiety within the very means through which the poetic activity comes about, namely the devices that execute the artistic intention.

This site becomes a point of intersection between the artist as a subjective consciousness articulating an individual meaning contained in it, on the one hand, and the reception of this articulation by an external audience, on the other. Significantly, the contact between poet and reader of poetry takes place within the material manifestation of the poet's private meaning, the work itself,⁴³ and its social stakes are evident in Huxley's preoccupation with vulgarity, or social refusal of the poetic predicate. Since the theatre of uncertainty is the very means of artistic expression, it follows that any attempt to use external, pragmatic criteria to dispense with it is bound to be strewn with internal contradictions. Therefore, Huxley's focus on technical matters, to the point of fetishisation, obliges us to radically contextualise his essay by linking it to an acute concern, still prevalent in early twentieth century, about the effects of modernity on literary production of meaning. To be sure, this can

⁴¹ *Virtuosity of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴³ Edward Said formulates the situation on the occasion of designating 'style' as 'the recognizable, repeatable, preservable sign of an author who reckons with an audience'. He argues that '[e]ven if the audience is as restricted as his self or as wide as the whole world, the author's style is partially a phenomenon of repetition and reception'; 'The Text, the World, the Critic', p. 163. The systemisation of reception poetics in these terms was attempted by Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton: Harvester Press and University of Minnesota, 1982).

be described in the same terms in which Lionel Trilling commented upon Jean-Jacques Rousseau's assault on modern theatre: 'his concern is far from being anachronistic: its real object is the developing status of literature in the modern world, its relation to that new social circumstance', that is to say, 'the ever more powerful existence of the public, that human entity which is defined by its urban habitat, its multitudinousness, and its ready accessibility to opinion'.⁴⁴

Looking closer at the manner in which Huxley disqualified Poe as a poet, one realises that it is not so much that Poe's devices are not poetical, but rather that they are too poetical. This is clear in two occasions in the text. First, in relation to 'Ulalume', Huxley argues that 'we find that its *too poetical* metre has the effect of vulgarizing by contagion what would be otherwise *perfectly harmless and refined technical devices*' (p. 306; emphasis added). Susan Bernstein's stress on the 'erosion of lyrical language' is illustrated, here, in metaphors testifying to the permeating action of vulgarity to which nothing is impermeable; even poetic language can be infested by vulgarity, a feature that, as we have seen earlier, Huxley places solidly in a social context steeped in ideological tensions. Secondly, when discussing Poe's rhyme words, Huxley points out that '[o]n other occasions Poe's proper names rhyme not only well enough, but actually, in the particular context, much too well' (p. 308-309). As these instances show, suspicion towards poetic execution is awakened in the very appearance of poeticity which, from that moment on, is deprived of the privilege of an independent relation to worldly considerations. Consequently, Poe's work is being submitted to the most thorough and unforgiving analysis for the reason that he has consistently used poetical devices with a magnified self-awareness as to their intended effect - devices which in their enhanced poetic visibility began to infect poetic significance with a tint of artificiality and falsehood. In the picture that Huxley paints, Poe enhanced the poetical awareness of his art in order to disarm possible contestations (cf. the repeated ad nauseam clause 'protest too much') - this seems to be the implication of the mechanical pattern of his poetry that Huxley criticises. Therefore, as the essay suggests, mechanicity is the effect of accentuating an aesthetic quality that is being

⁴⁴ See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 61.

distorted in the very process by which it becomes dominant, by which, that is to say, it becomes poetry.

The complication is essential. To present Huxley's polemic in such a light is to anticipate an important claim he forewords when, later on in the same essay, he pinpoints that sincerity in literature 'is mainly a matter of talent' (p. 310). One cannot help thinking, in this respect, of the metaphor of the stage props used by Poe to illustrate his theory of effect: 'in a word, [...] the wheels and pinions – the tackle for scene-shifting – the step-ladders and demon-traps – the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrion*'.⁴⁵ To return to Huxley, he argues that artistic 'beauty or elegance' is the absolute criterion of sincerity of emotions which, interestingly, regards both 'emotions which you do not naturally have' and emotions that you have (p. 309).⁴⁶ As a matter of fact, the paragraph that introduces the idea of sincerity in literature exhibits a shameless abundance of a Janus-faced vocabulary of 'simulated beliefs' (to use a phrase which was to acquire considerable importance for Eliot). Moreover, displaying feelings poetically cannot in principle constitute the basis for disqualification since art per se is a vulgar human activity. And in the case that the idea is still unclear, Huxley declares that 'the profession of letters', 'the putting of pen to paper', is inherently vulgar '[f]or exhibitionism is always vulgar' (p. 277). This amazing statement, which is reminiscent of Poe's famous separation of morality from poetry, places ambiguity at the heart of poetic writing and, thus, radicalises the aspersion already cast on literary otherworldliness as a result of new technologies of aesthetic perception.

Not only literary language is denied the right to make any special pleading, but its definition has to be filtered through the demotic, communicative discourse which used to be considered external to it for centuries. Therefore, it is specified that

⁴⁵ 'The Philosophy of Composition', in *Essays and Reviews*, pp. 13-25 (p. 14).

⁴⁶ The inadvertent emergence of 'emotions' in relation to the question of sincerity in literature points to an anthropomorphic awareness of artistic causality that could be linked to a debate about theatrical performance going as back as the eighteenth century. Theodor Ziolkowski describes the opposition between acting guidelines requiring the actor to produce 'within himself the emotion that he is supposed to represent on the stage', and those which demand from him to master 'a variety of physical techniques in the hope of dissembling emotion he does not feel'. See his article 'Language and Mimetic Action in Lessing's 'Miss Sara Sampson'', *The Germanic Review* (November 1965), 262-76.

‘[i]t is vulgar, in literature, to make a *display* of beliefs which you do not *naturally* have’, as ‘[i]t is also vulgar (and this is the more common case) to have emotions, but to express them so badly, with so many too many protestations, that you seem to have no *natural* feelings, but to be merely *fabricating* emotions by a process of literary *forgery*’ (p. 309; emphasis added). The two last notions in italics provide an insight into the odd, even twisted logic of modern suspicion towards poetic articulation. For, according to the etymology of the ancient Greek *poesis*, ‘fabrication’ is after all only a synonym word of the technical variety for the content of poetic praxis, that is to say, creation, or making. In this respect, when the critic voices the uneasiness of his day in the face of linguistic manipulation for aesthetic purposes, he inevitably ends up twisting the very nature of the activity: the uneasiness results in a reversal whereby the hallowed content of poetic ‘fabrication’ becomes a repudiated act of ‘forgery’.

By the same token, though, embodied concerns that permeate literary discourse can also shake its dogma-setting certainties. If the above assertions underpin the judgement of Poe as vulgar on account of his ‘flashy’ dactylic metre and proper names that rhyme only too well, it is very probable that his vulgarity indicates simply a higher dose of poetic disposition, an overzealous poetic imagination, as was already suggested above. This could account for the instance in which Huxley wishes that Poe be a poetic virtuoso who would ‘transcend[s] the limitations of the technical’, ‘and merge with poetic ideality’,⁴⁷ and, especially, when he specifies that ‘[i]t is only by luck or an *almost superhuman poetical skill* that these all too musical metres can be made to sound, through their insistent barrel-organ rhythms, the intricate, personal music of the poet’s own meaning’ (p. 301; emphasis added). No matter how alarming the connotations of the term ‘forgery’ might be, its detection on the whole is not tied to one signified, say, lack of poeticity, but can very well mean its opposite, namely possession of poeticity. This ambivalent state is the logical consequence of defining art as a vulgar human act in the first place. It follows that identifying technical excess in a given artistic expression cannot possibly be a reliable instrument of assessment as it cannot tell us whether it denies poeticity or utterly embodies it. Of necessity, then, all these ‘protestations’ that Huxley identifies

⁴⁷ *Virtuosity in Nineteenth Century*, p. 11.

in Poe's poems may be the means fabricating poetic feeling, and not at all evidence of vulgarity. Having spelled out 'the essential vulgarity of [the literary] trade', Huxley's attempt to discredit Poe's specific contribution to it has to keep a very delicate, indeed an impossible, balance. It turns out that, although the foreign representation is regulated by the authority of the native one, the latter is by no means safe in its insularity; it is engulfed too by anxiety over literary truth, or rather 'sincerity'. Huxley's aesthetic pronouncements are echoed spectacularly in Eliot's reprobation of Poe for lack of serious beliefs. Eliot's considerations concerning insincerity in display of feelings, ideas, and emotions in art re-formulate a real difficulty in legitimising in institutional terms poetic language against the challenging logic of capitalistic forms of artistic production and the heterodoxy of public opinion. Eliot, in a way, responded to the same concerns that haunted Huxley whose argument, in all its plainness, made the cultural and ideological embeddedness of literature difficult to ignore. As seen in the course of this chapter, inserting circumstantiality⁴⁸ in critical assumptions while at the same time pretending that doing so does not alter the conditions of criticism meant that the breach would eventually affect the power of the essay to motivate and to convince.

However, the lucidity with which Huxley came so close to these issues - as close as his own affiliations allowed him - is worthy of attention. To see how it was possible for him to perform such an oblique negotiation with the terms of an urgent literary crisis, which was essentially a crisis facing monocentric criticism, it is useful to read him with reference to a point raised by Baudelaire in his essay 'Éloge du maquillage'.⁴⁹ In contrast to Rousseau's hostile stance against literature as a corrosive agent in modern times, Baudelaire defends art as an improvement upon nature, 'un effort [...] vers le beau, une approximation quelconque d'un idéal dont le désir titille sans cesse l'esprit humain non satisfait', and, therefore, 'un des signes de la noblesse primitive de l'âme humaine'.⁵⁰ Most relevantly, Baudelaire goes on to clarify that '[i]l importe fort peu que la ruse et l'artifice soient connus de tous, si le succès en est certain et l'effet toujours irrésistible'; he explicitly sees there 'la

⁴⁸ In Said's sense, 'The World, the Text, the Critic', pp. 165ff.

⁴⁹ Baudelaire, *L'art romantique*, pp. 99-104.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 101 and 102.

légitimation de toutes les pratiques employées dans tous les temps'.⁵¹ His point is that once the artistic effect is achieved it does not matter whether the ruses used to bring it about are known. It is a point congruent with his overall valorisation of the 'majesté superlative des formes artificielles',⁵² and it can prove illuminating if seen with relation to Huxley's critical attention to the artificial devices.

But if we follow Huxley's example and place critical attention on the 'ruse' and 'artifice' adopted to confer a poetic feeling, then the ruse appears less an 'approximation of the ideal of beauty', and more a mechanically-induced causality borrowed from machinistic imagery. In other words, Huxley's rhetorical composition comes about from the fact that he regresses from the ideal artificiality strives for to the means of its pursuit, following the pressing anxieties of his day. Whereas for Baudelaire not only the use of artificial means is not secret but it utterly serves the wholeness of an 'irresistible' aesthetic feeling, and is congruent with it; revealingly, Baudelaire points out that 'il [le maquillage] peut, au contraire, s'étaler, sinon avec affectation, au moins avec une espèce de candeur'.⁵³ The openness with which artificiality in art is being displayed derives from the fact that the sought-after ideal is not taken from nature, whose imitation would then be a true sign of vulgarity; the ideal that artistic affectation strives for is qualified in the essay as 'spiritual' and 'immaterial', and is grounded on artistic imagination. Artificiality, and even affectation, partakes of beauty and is thus sublimated; as Baudelaire puts it, 'le bien [in the sense of both 'beau' and 'noble'] est toujours le produit d'un art'.⁵⁴

The inversion of merits between the two positions, Baudelaire's and Huxley's, is clear. However, Huxley was still able to formulate, despite his attitude of denial, the terms according to which the exposure of the work into the public realm had to bring out its mechanical, made-up fabrication. The very necessity by which the poem becomes manifest before its audience both entails and frustrates urgent questions of sincerity. For the only way to respond to the pressures of avowing its sincerity, its poetic being, is to assume a 'rhetoric of avowal, the

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 102.

⁵² Ibid., p. 101.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 103-104.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 100.

demonstration of single-minded innocence through attitude and posture'.⁵⁵ The antagonism of the two realities, the public and the private, is intimate and beyond erasure – the assertiveness with which Huxley advances his technical approach is a proof of the fact that critical discourse cannot escape enacting it. This inescapable embracing of the private and the public explains why such a lucid description of Poe's poetic effects by Huxley is historically compatible with their missing the bigger cultural picture of so poignantly mechanic or 'inorganic consciousness'. Milette Shamir stressed, in her discussion of the right to privacy, the importance, by mid-nineteenth-century of 'the problem of the alienability of personhood that emerged with modern capitalism',⁵⁶ that accounts for the truism that impersonality is part of industrial imagery. Thus, the fetishisation of poetic devices, in the manner of Huxley, is not an aberration in such times but rather an important, significant reflex of English criticism. Recent works in Poe scholarship, such as Terence Whalen's, have pinpointed the materialist determinant of antebellum literary production as the missing link in Poe's cultural underestimation.⁵⁷ But one needs not wait until the ninety nineties to witness the potential revealed in Whalen's political economy approach: he was preceded by the seminal criticism of Williams, who, contemporary to Huxley, was a fine example of a critic who becomes 'the alchemical translator of texts into circumstantial reality or worldliness'.⁵⁸

What remains is to stress that the differentiation between the two critics does not diminish the importance of the clarity with which Huxley responded to the cultural actualities of their day. Huxley, too, gave a perspicacious account of it. Thus, the concluding point of this study should concern the ways in which the entire principle of vulgarity Huxley promoted is seriously undermined in the theme of simulated beliefs, which is in turn tied to the premise of the artist's self-consciousness. This will provide the basis for a reading of Huxley's essay that is against the grain of his preconceptions but in tune with his aesthetic sense, thus

⁵⁵ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 70.

⁵⁶ Milette Shamir, 'Hawthorne's Romance and the Right to Privacy', *American Quarterly*, 49: 4 (December 1997), p. 748.

⁵⁷ 'Edgar Allan Poe and the Horrid Laws of Political Economy', pp. 381-417. See also John Tresch, "'The Potent Magic of Verisimilitude": Edgar Allan Poe Within the Mechanical Age', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 30: 3 (September 1997), 275-90.

⁵⁸ Said, 'The World, the Text, the Critic', p. 165.

revealing the overall effect of his indigenised figuration of Poe. The first relevant reference is that, '[f]or a self-conscious artist, there is a most extraordinary pleasure in knowing exactly what the results of showing off and protesting too much must be and then (in spite of this knowledge, or because of it) proceeding, deliberately and with all the skill at his command, to commit precisely those vulgarities, against which his conscience warns him' (pp. 296-97). And, immediately afterwards, '[t]o the aristocratic pleasure of displeasing other people, the conscious offender against good taste can add the still more aristocratic pleasure of displeasing himself' (p. 297). It is difficult not to see these utterances as an important undermining of his major line of thought since the idea of vulgarity he seeks to inscribe on Poe's poetry is found instead transformed into a conscious choice of a knowledgeable artist. The latter is aware of the measure and implications of his 'offence against good taste', and still proceeds with such an offence, even experiencing a perverse pleasure in the process. As for this nuance, it is directly drawn from Baudelaire who is being quoted as saying: 'ce qu'il y a d'enivrant dans le mauvais goût, c'est le plaisir aristocratique de déplaire' (p. 294).

It is particularly illuminating to notice that this argument running counter to Huxley's main position about Poe's vulgarity takes on striking ideological hues. The right (and/or source of pleasure) of the artist to opt for unauthorised artistic devices that depart from the common taste⁵⁹ is also stated as 'a duty to shock' (p. 294). The excerpt goes as follows: 'Retributive pain will be inflicted on the truth-haters by the first shocking truths, whose repetition will gradually build up in those who read them an immunity to pain and will end by reforming and educating the stupid criminals out of their truth-hating' (p. 294). This is a vociferous utterance, whose rhetoric alludes to the condescending bourgeois attitude towards unfamiliar truths and forms. It also seems to be declaring the artistic duty to promote the unfamiliar, even advocating a 'course of shocking'. Because 'a familiar truth ceases to shock', Huxley concludes that '[t]o render it familiar is [...] a duty' (p. 294). Despite what this enlightened approach might be suggesting about novel, shocking expressions that need to be maintained in art, one cannot help noticing how impossible this operation

⁵⁹ Common taste, after all, has already been assimilated by the artist as made evident in the assertion that 'by displeasing others he will displease himself'.

seems, both perceptually and functionally. The perceptual impediment is the conspicuous and pervasive determinism of Huxley's descriptions. The utterance 'a familiar truth ceases to shock' makes this evident for if art producing truths which shock those who resist them does so with the view to educating them, these truths will inevitably end up being domesticated and co-opted: therefore, whatever the space for novelty might be,⁶⁰ it should of necessity be ripe for extinction. These intricacies need to be enlarged as they trace a line of argumentation which was to be lucidly exposed, one generation later, by Adorno in his entry on Poe in *Minima Moralia*:

The new, a blank place in consciousness, awaited as if with shut eyes, seems the formula by means of which a stimulus is extracted from dread and despair. It makes evil flower. But its bare contour is a cryptogram for the most unequivocal reaction. It circumscribes the precise reply given by the subject to a world that has turned abstract, the industrial age. *The cult of the new, and thus the idea of modernity, is a rebellion against the fact that there is no longer anything new.*⁶¹

If there is any point in Huxley arguing about the necessity of shock in artistic production in his pre-eminently deterministic account of changes in literary perception, there also needs to be some sort of delay or disturbance in the process by which the shocking, the unfamiliar becomes familiar and automatically annihilates itself. A possible answer might lie in the function of the clause 'repetition of the first shocking truths' aiming, as Huxley says, at 'gradually build[ing] an immunity to pain' in their receivers. This deterministic circle can only break if the 'repetition' of the previously expressed work done in bad taste is also a distortion, an alteration, or even an outright abortion of the process. During the repetition stage, the unfamiliar work or artistic form needs to be retained as such and resist assimilation by its receivers rather than promote or safeguard it. This is precisely where questions of divergent reception become invaluable.

In a way, Huxley 'repeats' Baudelaire's shocking opinion of Poe but in a combative way: that is to say, he includes it in his essay and he assaults it at the same

⁶⁰ In the form, and cost, the essay suggests, of 'vulgarity' and 'wickedness'.

⁶¹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, tr. by E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), p. 235; emphasis added.

time from the territory of nativity. Even though it is initially referred to in terms of an off-hand dismissal, there have in fact been numerous discursive instances where it actually produced a pulsating⁶² acknowledgment of the foreign claim. The energy of the foreign inclusion is augmented, undiminished probably because it remains largely basic, crude and unprocessed by the essayist who – unlike Eliot – does not try to build his whole polemic of Poe around it. What he does instead is enhance, with the combined weight of commonsense triviality, the claim of the native on Poe, who as a consequence is totally engulfed by it. Moreover, he presents nativity as an entity that is beyond definition or elaboration and thus becomes a synonym for over-familiarity. It is with this crude, unsophisticated concept of nativity that the non-familiar enters into collision orbit. The native, the very figure of familiarity confronts the foreign which is, similarly, a synecdoche for un-familiarity. In the unequal encounter of the two claims, the effect seems to be that the value in the category of the unfamiliar is more or less entrusted into the hands of the foreign perception.⁶³

This is indeed the only way that the latter, by token of its obscurity, could perturb the business-as-usual perception of nationally-centred literature.⁶⁴ Because nativity and foreignness are construed as rigid opposites, the overall effect of Huxley's essay is that of an anomalous interruption inserted in the deterministic circle of literary perception. Thus, and despite the expedient manner of its handling, or maybe because of it, the foreign/unfamiliar is permitted to shine and permeate the canvas of the native-centred account in the process of its very deployment: the discursive space allocated to the foreign is where a contorted 'repetition' is to be

⁶² The adjective comes from Homi Bhabha's definition of 'enunciation' as a form of imagining the nation, which 'cannot be signified without the narrative temporalities of splitting, ambivalence and vacillation'; 'DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 291-322 (pp. 298-99). Its other qualification is 'repetition'.

⁶³ A similar point was made in the early stages of the present argument when linguistic nativity was discussed as the common denominator that eventually trivialises literary specificity.

⁶⁴ The foreign critical representation acquires, thus, hues of an invaluable heresy; invaluable because 'heresies', in the context of religious-spiritual context that Amos Funkenstein examines, 'were seen as a providential challenge to which the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, answered by the development of dogmas and rejuvenation through new orders'; 'History, Counterhistory, and Narrative', in *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the Final Solution*, ed. by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 66-81 (p. 73).

performed. In short, by resisting the shocking (because vulgar) 'truth' the French propounded about Poe, Huxley ensures the perpetuation of the unfamiliar into the very bosom of Anglophone criticism. One could just as well say that, while applying the mono-centric critical perspective, he breaks its determinist spell and thus joins, although from a quite different path, Williams's challenging performance. Unexpectedly, Huxley manages in this essay to lift the argument to a level at which it is possible 'to question his own assumptions, and thus make a drama out of a monologue'.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Clive James, 'Out of Sight. The Curious Career of Aldous Huxley', in *New Yorker*, 17 March 2003, pp. 143-48 (p. 148).

Conclusion

The thesis has explored Edgar Allan Poe's literary reputation by revisiting two separate historical moments of its re-inscription: the mid-nineteenth French and the early twentieth-century Anglo-American critical discourses. The selected contexts presented a number of differential readings of the work of Poe which, I argue, carry sufficient cultural weight so as to 'provide the framework for an enduring pattern of "response"'.¹ Those readings by Baudelaire, Eliot, Williams and Huxley constitute a virtual text accounting for Poe, their 'original', in relational terms. Given that Baudelaire's translation of Poe's work was the actual motor of cross-Atlantic exchange, the overriding task of the thesis has been to examine the limit or border² that Baudelaire's project constituted for the early twentieth-century reception of Poe in Anglophone discourse. Baudelaire's campaign triggered so much resistance and conflict over the Atlantic that it caused Poe's meaning in American letters to evolve; its peculiar effects are witnessed in the essays by Eliot, Huxley and Williams that were considered in the thesis.

The present chapter should be read in conjunction with the introductory part of the thesis so as to demonstrate the end results of the logic of argument announced there. For if the conflation of the method and the content value was explicitly pronounced as its major interest, then it makes sense to look now for the achievements and shortcomings of the thesis on the whole. To look for them, in the light of what was shown in the body of the thesis, is to turn the structuring principles inside out and explore more closely their implications. This Conclusion will, therefore, problematise what the introduction considered to be a tool of discovery, along the lines of Even-Zohar's position: 'By hypothesizing a relation as an explanation for an object (an entity, a process, etc.), relational thinking can arrive at

¹ Bennett, 'Text, Readers, Reading Formations', p. 218.

² For the notion of border, see the introduction of Stephen Greenblatt to *Redrawing the Boundaries. The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. by Stephen J. Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1992), p. 7ff.

assuming the “existence” of some phenomena which have not been recognized before’.³

Simply put, the difficulty of the enterprise is that both the findings and the manner of arriving at them are relational. First of all, Poe is not spoken of outside his acculturators, French and Anglo-American. Because the investigation did not try to reach a definitive answer as to what Poe’s work really was, the original to which these meta-discourses refer to was in effect taken to be incapable of producing meaning independently; emerging only in the light of their narratives, it was depicted as being fully caught in a network made up of their respective situated discourses. Instead of providing a centripetal system leading from these individual interpretations to an originary text, the approach consisted in introducing a ‘radical hesitancy’ into the analysis, a hesitancy such that, as Tony Bennett puts it, the originary text is ‘*the last thing one speaks of – and speaks of only in the particular historical reading relations in which it has been analytically located*’.⁴ Therefore, the analysis, which sought to arrange the emerging patterns of the critical writings, and categorise them into meaningful sequences, did not result in a grand syntax of the type a structuralist project would pursue: my omission of a chapter devoted to Poe testifies to that. The thesis deliberately installs the conceptual uncertainty or fuzziness of Poe’s work, a principle advocated in theoretical terms by Bennett and a number of cultural theorists, who were particularly interested in the constitution of literature as subject-matter of reception studies.⁵

By choosing to depict the original in such an intermittent, fragmentary and discontinuous way, it stops being a privileged authorial instance, uttered in its own terms, and is dislodged in its re-inscriptions. Poe, while simultaneously losing his predominance as the explanatory pivot of investigation, is being contextualised first in Baudelaire’s translational and critical frameworks, and then in the differing

³ Itamar Even-Zohar, ‘Polysystem Theory and Culture Research’ (1997) <<http://www.tau.ac.il/~itamarez/papers/psth-cr.htm>>

⁴ Ibid., p. 225.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981); John Frow, ‘Text and System’, in *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 170-206; Mircea Marghescou, *Le concept de littérature*; Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*; Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz, *Translating Poetic Discourse: Questions on Feminist Strategies in Adrienne Rich* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1985), pp. 25-40.

agendas of Eliot, Huxley and Williams.⁶ In the course of analysis, the selected contexts in which he is read become illuminative for one another as they are, in a sense, for him. As a result, the findings increasingly concern the rhetorical nature of these contexts, manifest in their respective performatives,⁷ while their respective ideological co-ordinates are partly acknowledged although they are not further explored: such a manner of analysis is clearly destructive of the self-fulfilling notion of 'context' as a means of reaching a transcendental view of the original work. If only by using them as multiple contexts of Poe's French reputation, the essays of Williams, Huxley, and Eliot become indispensable means of documentation, of a particular kind. The choice of the word *documentation* is not random. Unlike historiography, literary criticism is not compelled to look at metatexts in order to assess its primary material, viz. texts of the past. But when it chooses to do so, as in the case of the standard practice of reception studies, it ensures a structural approach to proto-texts that makes inferential statements about their puzzling contingencies under the pressure of their overdetermined nature (in terms of history, place and language). Even though a big portion of the bibliography in reception studies tends to be based on material/cultural approaches, for reasons of training I have chosen an approach which is grounded on close textual analysis, and is in tune with my epistemological investment in the method.

As a rule, when Poe scholarship sits within reception studies, it tends to privilege dual frameworks extricating, for instance, the implications of either the French, or the Anglophone reception, or other national contexts in more recent years.⁸ Although the setting is undoubtedly useful, it is still confided in an author-receiver relation which has been adequately and rightly criticised by anti-hegemonic discourses:⁹ its most regretful effect is that it treats the originary and the receiving

⁶ When beginning his account of recent models that promote a theory of reading, Paul de Man pinpoints their pre-condition in that they 'are no longer *simply* intentional and centered on an identifiable self, not *simply* hermeneutic in the postulation of a single originary, pre-figural and absolute text'; 'Resistance to Theory', in *Theory and History of Literature* (Manchester University Press, 1986), p. 17.

⁷ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 51.

⁸ For an embryonic attempt to pinpoint the limitations of the one-case study model, see Sebnem Susam-Sarajeva, 'Is One Case Always Enough?', *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, 9: 3 (2001), 167-77.

⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, pp. 60-61, and 5.

authors as self-secluded entities, and valorises authorship as an autonomous, self-sufficient entity. In a sense, then, it deducts transcendence from the 'original' only to confer it to its meta-texts – which was precisely what occurred with the critical analysis of Baudelaire's project from the standpoint of translation studies and comparative literature. Moreover, what is possibly not stressed enough in reception studies criticism is that dual frameworks end up reinstalling monocentric types of reasoning which eventually produce thematic and taxonomic commonplaces that national repertoires readily assimilate: simply put, dual inter-linguistic reception is not transnational enough.

The polyprismatic or stereoscopic account¹⁰ that the present thesis was based on caters in part for the need to break this mould. Its effects of dispersal are realised on two levels: the first concerns the place assigned to the original whose flippancy is radicalised, as we saw above and in the Introduction. In this respect, the thesis is in tune with the standard design of reception studies' research seeking to designate the originary site in terms not of sedentary content but in terms of effects of meaning.¹¹ The second, crucial, stage of dispersal concerns Baudelaire's project that is posited as the frame of intelligence for the three Anglo-American readings. This is mainly where the thesis diverges from the mainstream outlook of reception studies in relation especially to its monocentric predetermination. The challenge that this polyprismatic arrangement is faced with comes also from the field of cultural studies – of which a case in point is De Prosopo's 'Deconstructive Poe(tics)'.¹² The article makes it clear that recent American 'programs for Poe's "recuperation"' failed because their deconstructionist approaches could not exceed what De Prosopo called 'ethnocentrisme mou'.¹³ In effect, these interpretations hypostasise the American author by locating his work within thematic repertoires that are only too easily inscribed within mono-cultural thematic frameworks.¹⁴ The present thesis takes up

¹⁰ Rose, *Translation and Literary Criticism*, p. 90.

¹¹ Paul de Man, 'The Resistance to Theory', p. 7.

¹² R. C. Prosopo, 'Deconstructive Poe(tics)', *Diacritics*, 18: 3 (Fall 1988), 43-64.

¹³ Ibid., p. 53-55.

¹⁴ However, there have been Americanist accounts of Poe which, despite a monocentric outlook, managed to speak convincingly about their original as a result of their sociological mindset. Among these accounts Jonathan Elmer's work stands particularly out by proposing a model of reading Poe as both analyst and symptom of mass society. See especially the introductory section in his *Reading at the Social Limit*, p. 11ff.

the challenge and postulates that what authorises its relational account is not an unperturbed, original Poe, but the Poe invented by Baudelaire when he articulated his co-optation project. The Anglophone texts examined here have accordingly been constituted as the remote discursive repercussions of Baudelaire's project, discontinuous in many respects but poignantly aware of their French interlocutor. The analysis has demonstrated that they mainly dealt not with the work of Poe but with its 'literariness',¹⁵ contested traditionally and ascertained by Baudelaire. It also helped to realise that only by extending the notion of 'reception' to include narrative effects not anticipated in the originary site (Baudelaire's project, in this case) can the polyprismatic viewpoint have liberating powers. It certainly dethrones the cognitive primacy of the original work but that operation has long since been decided in contemporary reception studies; what it most crucially achieves is that it makes the original work available for further use, it intervenes in the sequence of its historical rewritings and extricates new literary contents.

Thus, the central premise has been that Baudelaire's project is the pre-eminent context illuminating the Anglophone writings dealing with Poe's literariness – a premise that consummates the second level of dispersal in relation to the problematisation of reception studies. As a result of this, the thesis finds itself in truly transnational territory. The transatlantic pattern, in particular, proved to be an adequate vehicle of following with some degree of flexibility the manner in which these contending readings of Poe came to interact over time, space, and languages. It also raises the ante given that the receiving end of Baudelaire's project does not represent a totality of meaning, something along the lines of a 'unified Anglo-American reception of Poe': each individual Anglophone account, in the course of analysis, was put to trial by a challenge to its proclaimed truth in the form of other contending interpretations in the same language and milieu. The foremost lesson has been that the comparative handling of these texts testifies to their constitution as historically induced representations that negotiate a fantasy of a literary essence in cultural terms. But if these narrative events are stages of Poe's historical education then it is reasonable to argue that literary history can and should be read textually.

¹⁵ Russian Formalists were the first to have suggested a way out of the complacency of reception studies with respect to their objects of study by replacing the notion of 'literature'

Up to this moment it has been established that the elusiveness of the original of these chosen authors, instead of being an obstacle of representation, is beneficial when related to theoretical considerations within the frameworks of cultural and reception studies, as well as in terms of heuristic operations. Furthermore, Poe was not simply replaced by Baudelaire's project in the thesis' layout; Baudelaire does not provide another original for the Anglo-American writings but a rewriting of an imagined original that defers tantalizingly a stable referential relation to it. The implication of using his project as the context of signification for the Anglo-American essays is that their own attempt at critical pronouncement acquires the character of persuasion. Because they are oppositional in nature, it would not be sufficient merely to pontificate on the issue, as, at regular intervals, Huxley and Eliot attempt; they need to convince about the truth of their claim to Poe's debated literariness, hence their narrative entanglement. The term used in the introduction to convey how I move from the abstraction of the comparative model to actual practice was that of alignment: the teachings of Baudelaire's project were aligned to those of the Anglophone critics with a view to identifying instances of both accord and departure. The underlying assumption was that the Anglo-American meta-texts sought to persuade an imaginary reader of the justness of their perspective as opposed to that of the French education of Poe. Even though this might only be a partial inlet, it is, in accordance with the theoretical makeup of the thesis, a device that allows the uncertainty of transatlantic negotiation to come to the fore.

The rhetorical difficulties in the making of texts that are essentially turned towards the other side of the Atlantic to find their bearings brings us to the second aspect of difficulty, or challenge of the thesis in general. It concerns the relational means of analysis and covers both the choice of texts and their actual processing. Even though the introduction has extensively dealt with the former issue, some additional points are needed here. It is accurate to say that Poe's literary reputation, as it is understood today, has been constructed largely out of difficult situations. There has been a tendency to round off these splintered episodes in terms strongly reminiscent of Eliot's all-encompassing account of Poe – a tendency evident in casual generalisations which are no less important in reinforcing trends and fashions

with that of 'literariness'.

in literary actuality. This is mainly why the relational manner of demonstration needs to be stressed as a strategic feature of the thesis' design. An attempt to bring together texts situated in different reading communities, intra- and inter-cultural, instantly triggers the danger of reification inherent in reception studies as it was in its historical precursor, comparative literature. Such a foregrounding of differences in reception can easily lend itself to a unifying interpretation seeking re-conciliation of differences and consensual assessment of the material should its terms remain unanalysed. Mary Louise Pratt has aptly criticised the manner in which the notion of 'interpretive communities' has been put to the task in both linguistics and literary criticism in terms of a 'nostalgia for the lost totality of the larger community'.¹⁶ There is no room for nostalgia in this type of transatlantic setting: this study welcomes complexity and resists the clarity of a levelling structuralist account that would deal with meta-texts in terms of organic outgrowth. Susan Manning, when presenting her argument in *Fragments of Union*, writes: 'The detailed readings I offer are intended to imply many others that might have been, while always attempting to keep differences alive within the framework, to prevent my structure from becoming a straitjacket for the writings which alone can give it substance'; she also speaks of relations that 'cross and counter-cross, connecting with others beyond my present concerns, but which lead out into further contexts of relationship'.¹⁷

Following Pratt's injunction, the design claims as its ground 'the blurry frontier where dominated and dominant meet'.¹⁸ The handling of the material follows the comparative intention to explore 'relations between readings'. Earlier on, I used the term 'means of documentation' to refer to the Anglophone response to Baudelaire's project. It is now time to point out the illusively stable denotations of the term, and to insist on the value of artificiality: there might be some benefit from a socio-historical understanding of metatexts-as-documents, but literary study can never aspire to an undisputed cognitive status as, for instance, archival research does. In this light, the opted for scheme opposing the French to the Anglophone teachings serves only the purpose of enhancing the appropriative quality of Baudelaire's

¹⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, 'Linguistic Utopias', in *The Linguistics of Writing. Arguments Between Language and Literature*, ed. by Nigel Fabb and others (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 48-66 (p. 57).

¹⁷ *Fragments of Union*, pp. 31 and 25 respectively.

project; it does not wish to make Baudelaire the undisputed, quasi-unique spokesperson of Poe's French education. In Jonathan Culler's words, '[i]n France, the most talented poets have praised Poe as a genius of the first order, although Baudelaire's *poète maudit* and master of short story, Mallarmé's sublime poet, and Valéry's lucid theoretician of poetic effects are not exactly the same figure'.¹⁹ This caveat should be kept in mind especially in view of the metonymic use I made of Baudelaire's project in Part II, designating collectively the French teaching of Poe; this would normally require an extensive study circumscribing a broad range of consecutive reception phenomena in the European geo-space. The liberal use of the proper name of Baudelaire, which speaks of the preconceptions that account for the intelligibility of my narrative, might strike one as seamless. This is the reason why the instability of its Anglophone counterparts, three differential but interconnected writings, is there to belie it. In sum, the neatness of the artificial arrangement exercised constant pressure on the technique of alignment; the challenge was to show, without abandoning the largely revealing frame of transatlanticism, that there is no unified mono-Anglophone or mono-Francophone construction of Poe as such, but a problematic negotiation in each repertory triggered by the contemplation of the Other, be it native or foreign. Also, because the alignment of the French and the Anglo-American texts is dictated by purposes of discovery, and not determinism, the findings have to be uncertain, transient: this was the major constraint under which analysis sought to establish protruding conceptual patterns identified piecemeal in the inflections of these metatexts.

To these ends, close reading²⁰ was the technique chosen in order to trace a path of analysis through difficult territory; the thesis had to embrace complexities and be content with the slow pacing of accumulating and combining patterns of signification. The potential of rhetorical analysis in its new lease of life has been

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁹ Jonathan Culler, 'Baudelaire and Poe', *Zeitschrift für Französische Sprache und Literatur*, 100 (1990), 61-73 (p. 61).

²⁰ An attempt to base, alternatively, the comparative constitution of Poe in an encyclopaedic notion of history could readily lead into the 'crudest type of historicism', as was the case with Jefferson Humphries' *Metamorphoses of the Raven* (1985), in which the affiliation between the French and Poe was attributed to analogous defeat experiences in the American South and France in the 1870s and during World War II; de Prosopo, 'Deconstructive Poe(tics)', p. 53.

shown mainly in the work of New Historicism.²¹ Louis Montrose explains the 'reciprocal relationship between the discursive and material domains' as follows:

Acknowledging language as the medium in which the Real is constructed and apprehended, a new socio-historical criticism takes as its subject the interplay of culture-specific discursive *practices* in which versions of the Real are instantiated, deployed, reproduced – and also appropriated, contested, transformed. Integral to this new project of historical criticism is a realization and acknowledgement that the critic's own text is a fully implicated in such an interplay as are the texts under study; a recognition of the agency of criticism in constructing and delimiting the subject of study, and of the historical positioning of the critic vis-à-vis that subject.²²

Its use in this polyprismatic, multi-faceted case enhances the intense complexity of the links and concatenations that the discursive representations unveil. In a sense, as soon as the safety of the original as legitimising agent of its re-writings is abandoned, the demonstration needs to be hesitant, grapeshot, tentative. This 'unwillingness to abstract resistance from its moment of performance', to use Benita Parry's felicitous expression,²³ informs the demonstrative part of the thesis which insists on the rhetorical articulation of the texts and lingers, sometimes tediously, on the particular manner in which their response to a novel literary configuration was composed. As Gallagher has pointed out, '[a]nalysis of an aesthetic representation must not be a way of containing or closing off this complexity but rather of intensifying it',²⁴ while De Man qualified techniques of rhetorical readings as, potentially, 'boring, monotonous, predictable and unpleasant', but nevertheless 'irrefutable'.²⁵ Being contingent in outlook, the textual analysis has brought forward the inherent instability, the permeable quality of the Anglophone negotiation with Baudelaire's

²¹ Indispensable, in this respect, is *Practicing New Historicism*, ed. by Gallacher and Greenblatt; see also Stephen J. Greenblatt, ed., *Allegory and Representation. Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1979-80* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). For the rhetorical constitution of historical discourse, see Dominick LaCapra, 'Rhetoric and History', in *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, New York: n.p., 1985), 15-44; also the work on historiography and discursive formations by Hayden White, Michel de Certeau, and Clifford Geertz, especially his 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-30.

²² 'Renaissance Literary Studies and the Subject of History', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16: 1 (Winter 1986), 5-12 (pp. 8 and 7 respectively).

²³ Parry, 'Resistance Theory', p. 179.

²⁴ Gallagher, *Practising New Historicism*, p. 107.

dissonant critical pronouncement. In fact, the notion of the original work as a fantasy, its fleeting image caught in these metatexts is the necessary corollary of this insistent, fetishising approach. The textual findings clearly show the Anglophone critics' positionality to be inscribed on the body of the refracted original, namely Baudelaire's Poe.

In general, the effectiveness of the thesis in pursuing its goals can only be judged against the grapeshot manner of rhetorical analysis. Having defined its overall aim as an intersection of content and method, it would not in fact be wise to put distance between the two. And, sure enough, relating the transatlantic commerce of Poe's literary worth in such a way proved rewarding. Before detailing these findings, a few points should be made about the validity of rhetorical reading for Part I. Bearing in mind that, unlike the Anglophone rewritings, Baudelaire's project stands in the system of readings as an emblematic cultural text with no other French interlocutors beside it, the analysis took particular care to showcase its contrived nature. It has indeed established that Baudelaire attempted in his narrative emplotment to recuperate Poe's meaning but, in order to do so, he followed a path which was by no means straightforward nor monolithic. Whatever authorial intention one might wish to identify in the project, it would most certainly have to find its way amidst opposing, heterogeneous claims orchestrated in the most pronounced fashion: these include different readership markers, Parisian worldliness tugging at cosmopolitan fantasies, mass market injunctions and elitist predilections, journalistic ethos versus affective identification, cultural clichés about America coexisting with transatlantic adulation in the figuration of Maria Clemm, a continual tug of war between particularistic and universalistic tropes. In a sense, the virtuosity of Baudelairean prose consists in making both localised and transcendental vistas possible without giving cognitive predominance to neither.

A crucial point made in the introduction should be repeated here: the particular centrality of Baudelaire's project in determining the subsequent Anglophone writings on Poe is due to the fact that it represents a montage of Poe's work and persona - in Part I it was also referred to as 'emplotment'. Baudelaire translated virtually all of Poe's prose work, and he accompanied the time-consuming

²⁵ 'Resistance to Theory', p. 19.

translations with a series of critical writings illustrating beyond the shadow of the doubt the aesthetic importance he attributed to it. In his Poe project, as this is understood here, he splices together two things that could very well have remained separate: on the one hand, the actual tales, translated by him and scattered in different printed media and, on the other hand, the biography-cum-poetics of their author. What is more, the former is shown to be the *œuvre* of a man (a word with which Eliot tantalisingly obsesses), who is purported to be alienated from his native culture into the bargain.

Therefore, when in the nineteen thirties and forties Anglophone writers, in tune with European aesthetic considerations, turned their eyes to Baudelaire's teaching they were not faced with a loose, haphazard work. Their narratives made it clear that they had to cope with a radically fashioned and coherent image sponsored most emphatically by a leading poet of modernity they strongly admired. It cannot be doubted that it was the combined force of Baudelaire's montage and the theme of alienation that heavily weighed on the transatlantic concerns of Williams, Eliot and Huxley. Because the translation of Poe's work adds incontestable material relief to Baudelaire's assertions about its aesthetic importance, it is hard for these authors not to feel compelled to account for such a convincing emplotment. Thus, my presupposition in thus arranging the two discursive formations across the Atlantic has been that had Baudelaire been content with only one of the two facets of his project, it would not have had the effect it actually had.²⁶

However, an important nuance needs to be added at this point. Apparently Baudelaire's montage-piece constitutes for the Anglophone writers a defiant vantage point²⁷ which should have appeared simply overwhelming given that as native speakers they were synchronic to Poe's work - this is an intimation we get from all three writers in the most emphatic manner. But appearances, especially in the landscape of reception studies, are deceptive as they can be insightful: one should realise that the privileged point of a displaced reading such as Baudelaire's can only

²⁶ Such a pseudo-axiomatic phrasing takes its inspiration from a very early formulation of the contingency of historical discourse, brilliantly registered by Isaac d'Israeli: 'Of a History of Events Which Have not Happened' in *A Second Series of Curiosities of Literature. Consisted of Researches in Literary, Biographical, and Political History; of Critical and Philosophical Inquiries; and of Secret History* (London: John Murray, 1823), I: pp. 101-121 (pp. 101-102).

²⁷ De Man, 'Allegory and Irony in Baudelaire', p. 110.

be an invention, one which does not simply emanate from the translator's exterior position with respect to Poe's work. As such, its difference from a properly synchronic reading, presumably Anglo-American, is that by definition it has from the very outset to render positive its systemic (that is to say, inter-linguistic) incongruity with the work in order to achieve signification. However, to a great extent this imposing tale about Poe triggered a nativity-centred reflex in both Eliot and Huxley and lead them to structure their tales around the thorny at least for us, modern readers) issue of linguistic nativity. William Carlos Williams's structural understanding of interlinguistic commerce demonstrates that Baudelaire's foreignness with relation to Poe's work can in no way account for his appropriative, innovative impact even though it remains the preliminary condition. Thus, Williams's essay can illustrate that the other two critics were mistaken to perceive a condition of transatlantic exchange – crucial because it stemmed from the reality of linguistic barriers - as the essence of Baudelaire's appropriation par excellence. Literary understanding and discrimination across borders is, simply, not contained in the lingual difference per se; actually, it is affected by so many variables that it is, to most intents and purposes, unpredictable, or, to put it philosophically, overdetermined.

With this main difference between the three Anglophone texts in mind, it should be pointed out that the leverage of Baudelaire's project was manifest in the urgency that notions of nativity acquired in these writings. The difference in transatlantic reception that the Baudelairean project brought to full view played a pivotal role in invigorating monocultural readings of literature such as Huxley's and Eliot's. The point should be insisted upon: under foreign challenge, the three critics' response is not an improvisation but a variation on the same theme, namely, linguistic nativity as a determinant of literary value, an index of literariness. In the course of analysis, exclusivist native views with differing degrees of linguistic prescriptivism came to the fore as a reflex to the French naming of Poe in an attempt to immobilise deviance in literary criticism. The stress Huxley and Eliot put on national belonging as the indisputable basis of literary value, the isolationist doctrine that underpins it, follows a direction converse to that of a genuinely heuristic, and

consistent transatlantic curiosity like that of Williams's in his own reading of the French Poe.

It is important, at this point, to stress that the theme of Poe's cultural alienation enjoyed a peculiar treatment in Baudelaire's project, as Part I makes evident. Baudelaire certainly relied on a common nineteenth-century cliché about America being a commercialised culture. The cliché was pervasive not only in the French literary milieu, but also in Western-European collective epistemologies. For instance, the same 'petty mercantilism' of the Anglo-Saxon world was used by intellectuals in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Germany as a vehicle for their own narcissistic fantasies.²⁸ Within the frame of such a widespread cultural sanctioning and bearing in mind the particular value that his own generation attached to an emblematic, because out of step, artistic awareness, Baudelaire was in a sense culturally authorised to use such a perception of America's particularity.²⁹ But, as was advanced in Part I, the motion did not contain nor exhaust in any way Baudelaire's refiguration of Poe's significance. Its value was only partial and consisted largely in that it had European currency and it was, thus, culturally recognisable. Especially in the light of the findings of Chapter III, it seems plausible to argue that the theme rather gives Baudelaire the opportunity to enhance his narrative dramatically, and helps him to draw a lucid portrait of an artist determined by a resistant identity. That he does not make a clear-cut cultural hero out of Poe, as was often maintained, is evident in a series of narrative instances in which the features of the artist become discernible only through the shades of a vulgar, mercantile environment that Baudelaire re-enacts with precision; the precision can be sarcastic and distanced but, at times, it is also unmarked and unchecked. Additionally to that, the figure of Maria Clemm Baudelaire sought to foreground is equally significant for it embodies a type of secular recognition of artistic integrity that is simultaneously part of the source (and, funnily, target-ed) culture, and exogenous to it. These salient rhetoric patterns substantiate the uncertainty which comes eventually to define, and add relief, Baudelaire's 'anti-Americanism'.

²⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Question: "What is German?"', *New German Critique*, 36 (Fall 1985), 121-31 (p. 123).

If we perceive his project in this way, its meta-readings should not come as an absolute surprise for the same uncertainty is found there too: they redouble, in effect, this ambivalent attitude. Although Poe is being figuratively repatriated by Huxley and Eliot, read predominantly as an instance of an arrested national sensitivity, the actual way in which they integrate native and non-native³⁰ representations narratively has nevertheless some very interesting scattering effects. The way in which the French agent of difference is activated renders their narratives porous too, and finally impinges on their main concern, to promote nativity as a privileged means of literary signification; in this respect, the tale of Huxley, which is monolithic compared to Eliot's, is quite revealing. Despite a most emphatic declaration of intention, both chronicles constitute in the end an irrefutable argument *against* the claim of nativity. They, thus, suggest that Adorno was correct when he posited in 1958, in his discussion of the use of foreign words in native language, that all operations of interlinguistic interference are invaluable because they expose this truth: that language is a mediated form. In his discussion of the putative authenticity of native discourse, he ascertains that 'foreign words unmask these terms: only what is translated back into foreign words from the jargon of authenticity means what it means'.³¹

The second part of the thesis argues that no matter how rigid the staging of inter-cultural opposition, every enactment of it is bound to generate a series of new and unwarranted meanings that were not exactly intended by the writers: this stands for both the French and the Anglophone critics. The latter might have been motivated by an insular desire but once they incorporated the French inscriptions, unsettlement and hybridisation ensued. This is most evident in the account of Eliot, who is more transatlantically minded than Huxley and even Williams. This procedure of integration of difference is a crucial stage in the development of the overall argument of the thesis because it allows it to identify an aspect of the comparative perspective

²⁹ Needless to say, the long saga of 'French Ameriphobia' is far from over. A recent, captivating chronicle of it is Simon Schama's 'The Unloved American. Two Centuries of Alienating Europe', *New Yorker*, 10 March 2003, pp. 34-39.

³⁰ The findings bring out the heuristic potential of defining oppositional discursive practices in terms of 'disidentification'. Michel Pêcheux, who coined the term, defines it as 'a working (transformation-displacement) of the subject-form and not just its abolition'; *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, pp. 157, and 159.

that is particularly valuable: re-writings, translational or not, constitute highly illuminative contexts of mutual signification. This is the essence of what Paul Giles has pointed out in relation to the specific relevance of the comparative method in the embattled field of American Studies.³² Having debunked notions of origin as the ultimate centre of reception analysis, its value as a fantasy that helps to instigate a pursuit of meaning in different discursive formations remains unscathed. In this sense, and on a practical level, each re-writing provides a context for reciprocal signification.³³ Although the purpose and scope of the present study precludes an examination of whether and how the renewal of the Poe debate in twentieth century America has influenced the French criticism of Baudelaire's project,³⁴ it nonetheless shed a tangential light on the premises and constraints which inform the three Anglophones' responses to the French project.

Thus, the differences between the three critical pronouncements become all the more intelligible as attempts to persuade: their fulcrum, we saw it, is the French teaching. Here is where the transatlantic arrangement organises the reception chronicle into a particularly meaningful account. In this light, Williams stands apart from the nativity-oriented, hypostasising accounts of Huxley and Eliot: linguistic purity as a criterion of evaluation, proffered against the deviant Baudelairean reading, was precisely what he deliberately left out of his appreciation of Poe. For him linguistic and literary propriety was something to be swept aside, in the manner of Poe, as 'colonial imitation'; Americans, as he put it, 'have snapped asunder the leading-strings of our British Grandmamma'.³⁵ This type of distancing from English as the discredited language of the metropolis is, simply, not made by the other two who instead go on to consider Poe's linguistic deviations, either in lexical or rhythmical choices, as occasions for damning his craftsmanship. Williams's essay is in fact the first text in this relational system that makes the difference between

³¹ 'Words from Abroad', p. 190.

³² 'Virtual Americas', pp. 523-47; also Giles, 'Trans Atlantic', plenary address at the first conference of the Center for Transatlantic Studies, Maastricht, 12 October 2000.

³³ Giles, 'Reconstructing American Studies', pp. 335-58.

³⁴ For a concise discussion of the potentiality of studying Baudelaire's project from the viewpoint of the French receptive context, see Jany Berretti's 'Edgar Allan Poe en traduction française', pp. 189-196.

³⁵ Williams, 'Edgar Allan Poe', p. 20.

American and English critically visible.³⁶ In contrast to Eliot and Huxley, Williams bases his figuration of Poe on a revamped concept of 'legitimate originality' which, as Jonathan Elmer pointed out, 'manifest[s] itself less in its ability to point to its parentage than in its capacity to discover an inauthentic, bastard originality and to mark it off from its own text as an alien citation'.³⁷ So much for the putative unity of perception in Anglophone criticism, which seems to be a recurring fallacy in Poe scholarship despite repeated demonstrations to the opposite effect.

The other important lesson of reflective operations concerns the inherent ambivalence of the Anglo-American accounts, identified in numerous occasions. In the cases of Eliot and Huxley, it erupts into perception and works against the grain of their evident wish to give a clear-cut judgment; in the case of Williams, ambivalence turns out to be his preferred instrument of manipulation. In the course of the last three chapters, rhetorical ambivalence was described as a language of 'intimacy' and 'recoil'. The vocabulary, borrowed from Benita Parry,³⁸ is deliberately evanescent to designate that it is virtually impossible, from the viewpoint of grammatical articulation, to decide whether the essays dismiss or embrace Baudelaire's teachings. The critics, by disidentifying themselves with the French Poe, gave off unwitting manifestations of empathy within the boundaries of predominantly insular narratives. In proof of that, a strongly authoritative account such as Eliot's is steeped in throbbing hybrid instances which, along the pervasive mode of self-censorship, take the form of contradictions, tautologies, reiterations, lost opportunities, impasses, etc. His torn response to a representation he saw as challenging the predominance of domestic, institutionalised literary discourse takes a fuller meaning when read next to Homi Bhabha's utterance concerning the colonial power of diffusion: 'Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that, in some form or other, secure the

³⁶ Bearing in mind that both Eliot and Huxley did not claim the category of the American as distinct from that of the English, the thesis was compelled to choose the qualification 'Anglophone' throughout its descriptive operations.

³⁷ *Reading at the Social Limit*, p. 35.

³⁸ 'Resistance Theory', p. 188. The same idea is disclosed in Adorno's nominal pair, 'attraction' and 'aversion'; cited in Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 14.

“pure” and original identity of authority)’.³⁹ Every time that Eliot repeats the French reading of Poe he generates a novel negotiation with it in terms that eventually escape his control: apparently his terms have already been hybridised, discursively corrupted by the French inscription. Difference proliferates under the very eye of the concentric critic’s surveillance.⁴⁰

To some extent, these accounts inscribe the foreign while at the same time attempting to exorcise it and thus seem to consolidate its unsettling hold on concentric types of reading. As a consequence, they were not handled as samples of conservative critical praxis for the simple reason that by claiming to occupy the literary centre they ended up illuminating its mechanisms of co-optation and, to a later stage, inviting revisionist gestures.⁴¹ From the perspective of translation criticism, the point - which is also valid for Baudelaire’s positionality with relation to the American context - is read along these lines: ‘a translator can redirect the ethnocentric movement of translation so as to decenter the domestic terms that a translation project must inescapably utilize’.⁴² With its walking pace obliging, the close textual reading showed the manner in which each of these accounts, contingent and culturally embedded, brings about reading effects that surpass the author’s major presuppositions. If the texts are regarded in their material disconnectedness then each extrapolates the text it negotiates with: in a sense the texts as ‘real’ objects of the reflective operations are not there, at least not before the negotiation begins.⁴³ Thus, the interest in meta-translational utterances lies mainly in their rhetorical ‘excess’⁴⁴ rather than in any conspicuous ideological content attached to the principles they seem to advocate.

³⁹ ‘Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817’, *Critical Inquiry*, 12: 1 (1985-86), 144-65 (p. 154).

⁴⁰ This point was also raised by Tejaswini Niranjana in her article ‘Colonialism and the Politics of Translation’, p. 40.

⁴¹ Rosenheim and Rachman, *The American Face of Poe*, pp. ix-xx.

⁴² Venuti, *Scandals of Translation*, p. 82.

⁴³ The absurdity of this was explored in the introduction of the present thesis, which detailed the logic of its ‘reverse’ structuration. But it is also a shield against a common accusation against reception studies, and literary theory for that matter, that its object of study ‘is not contested or disputed, but on the contrary is taken for granted’ (Even-Zohar, 1997: 2); the main insight that the thesis has afforded is that there is always excess, spill-over and hybridisation in cross-over narratives.

⁴⁴ Venuti, *ibid.*, p. 68.

This is a point which, once again, brings us to the importance of this type of critical manipulation as a peculiar entanglement of content and method: in the critical texts discussed, no enlightened praxis was designated, no reactionary prose was chastised. Close reading as a means of discovery also displayed – even at times beyond the speculated expectations that have contained it – how hard, how deeply problematic it is to predicate certain contents to certain varieties of performatives – especially those which similarly to those examined proceed to a comparative investigation and polarise their points of reference. These contents, whether aesthetic or ideological, do not emanate from distinct sources. They are, in the main, discursive, which means to say that they compliantly negotiate with contending idioms in whatever manner appears most adequate to restrict and eventually annihilate the power to convince of their counterparts. Such a contending impulse is similar to an undeclared war – and war is fed on the ammunition that lies around at the time, that actuality makes available. In his concise article dealing in part with questions of reception, George Steiner describes comparative literature as based on:

a twofold principle. It aims to elucidate the quiddity, the autonomous core of historical and present ‘sense of the world’ (Husserl’s *Weltsinn*) in the language and to clarify, so far as it is possible, the conditions, the strategies, the limits of reciprocal understanding and misunderstanding as between languages. In brief, comparative literature is an art of understanding centred in the eventuality and defeats of translation.⁴⁵

The quotation is revealing in that it foregrounds the twofold principle as an oppositional notion, an ontological binarism: there is correctness and wrongness to be extracted from the multiple historical-linguistic acceptations of the ‘sense of the world’. As Steiner saw it, if there are two perceptions of a literary work, one needs to be a mistranslation, a misunderstanding; the unsettling and richly productive potential of comparative projects disclosed in his word ‘eventuality’ is in effect denied in his pontifical ‘defeats’. The terms are reminiscent of Eliot’s sketching of the Anglophone and Francophone receptions of Poe. Even if the diachronic vagaries of a work need to be accounted for by the comparatist in all their zigzag variance – Steiner’s ‘historical and present “sense of the world”’ – they still inhabit the same

⁴⁵ ‘What is Comparative Literature?’, p. 151.

system of polarities, the same axiological hierarchy that Williams's systemic reading unflinchingly avoided, as we saw in Chapter 1, Part II.

The type of criticism that the thesis design expresses, moved by a will to interrupt such positions, is hardly new. In an analogous instance, Umberto Eco is being criticised by Tony Bennett for valorising a disembodied notion of 'the text itself' in contrast to its 'filtered, distorted, inadequately understood' uses.⁴⁶ The thesis cannot but share and repeat Bennett's concluding statement, that the point is 'to question the procedure whereby the relations between different readings are conceived as differences between valid and invalid, more or less appropriate responses, and in which the criteria of validity or appropriateness are supplied by the critic's own construction of the "text itself"'.⁴⁷ It is evident, therefore, that having grafted the writings of Williams, Eliot, and Huxley on Baudelaire's 'discursive actualisation', the thesis is situated within the epistemology of the 'comparative perspective'. Consequently, it does not relate a chronicle of arbitrary receptive moments in the after-life of Poe. It rather builds a meaningful, relational system having direct bearings on the difficult itinerary that Anglophone critical discourse had to trace as its modernist preoccupations pitted its concentric ideality against a novel, transnational model of reasoning.

The vacant originary site opened up a circle of questions which grounded a relational system of re-writings/re-readings across the Atlantic: Parts I and II evinced the inadequacy of the critics under study to exhaust a mono-national signification of literariness at the precise moment when they embarked on a determined enterprise to do so.⁴⁸ The comparative patterning of the received Poe scholarship foregrounds a hybridisation which is revealed to occupy the core of such a vacated, fantasised originary site. Rhetorical analysis has established that manifestations of hybridity are systematic enough to warrant an interest that surpasses the anecdotal; what Bhabha has named 'Third Space', the hybrid moment, is most likely to transpire in

⁴⁶ 'Text, Reader, Reading Formations', p. 220.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 221.

⁴⁸ The 'certainty of that failure [...] keep[s] alive the energies unleashed' by a 'raw text', as Martin Jay put it; *Adorno*, pp. 13-14. Similarly, these appropriating readings have secured the sustainable re-activation of their original as an impossible fantasy, and added their effects, intended or not, to Poe's scholarship.

oppositional, transnational representations, an instance of which is the transatlantic network examined in the thesis.

In a sense, the Francophone / Anglophone poles of reference were not opposed to one another as cognitively fixed points; they are rather structural indexes serving the purpose of showing the dialectic of domination (hence the emphasis on linguistic nativity over foreign dispersal), on the one hand, and its necessary effects of hybridity, on the other. When the word from Paris crosses the Atlantic to be inserted in these norm-setting writings, it causes a discursive tension in their interior logic that is not quite contained by authorial intent.⁴⁹ The critics' respective platforms, explicitly proffered at times, are of auxiliary interest given that their peculiar dialogue with the French Poe has produced further conflict and dissimilarity in the sites of the other Anglophone essays (hence the same-language juxtapositions between, say Williams and Eliot, or between Eliot and Huxley that the argument has encouraged). First and foremost, the collusion of a contending inter-linguistic idiom within the same critical utterance produces ambiguity,⁵⁰ an ambiguity we cannot simply do away with, otherwise we would lose sight of the antithetical manner in which the system becomes alive. It should be stressed that it is on the textual inscription of hybridity that reception studies should ground its interrogation so as both to explain and escape the perennality of oppositional representations as is the case with highly divergent literary reputations like Poe's. To conclude, the thesis relates the story of critics who apparently speak about matters of their national literature when they speak, in effect, about literariness voiced by foreign tongues. In this respect, the case of Huxley is enlightening because his ultra-native account simply cannot hold if it does not posit the disruption of the native by the foreign. Thus, it is no accident that I conclude the thesis, which on the whole portrays a transatlantic dialogue, with Huxley's seeming monologue: we have seen, in the last pages of Chapter 3, Part II, that his aesthetic sense is in fact utterly conditioned by the non-Anglophone regime he wishes aggressively to contain. The transatlantic rift

⁴⁹ Nor should modern day comparatists contain and tame this narrative tension by recuperating it for their mono-national audiences and literary canons.

⁵⁰ Homi Bhabha describes such effects in the following way: 'The intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open, expanding codes'; 'The Commitment to Theory', p. 21.

over the modernist meaning of Poe will not be solved in terms of right and wrong and certainly not in terms of mono-national repertoires – it can only be solved on the discursive level, articulated in the fraught middle ground that such critical writings come to occupy: this is the main lesson that the thesis wishes to impart.

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